

**MILAGROS DE NUESTRA SEÑORA BY
GONZALO DE BERCEO AND LAIS BY MARIE DE FRANCE:
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

by

Pamela Bastante

B.A. Simon Fraser University, 1998

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS UNDER SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS
in the Faculty
of
Arts

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

January 2000

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0-612-61407-7

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Abstract

The Camino de Santiago is credited with many cultural and religious exchanges in the Middle Ages. My study will analyze the work of the Spanish poet, Gonzalo de Berceo, and the French poet, Marie de France, as an example of the cultural exchanges between France and the Iberian Peninsula by means of the Camino de Santiago in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Even though these writers belong to different social backgrounds, and composed their texts for distinct purposes, we find similarities in their works. These two medieval authors have often been studied separately but it is my goal to demonstrate their similarities.

Chapter 1 gives a socio-political overview of the Iberian Peninsula during the thirteenth century and demonstrates how these factors influenced Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. We will see how it integrates popular elements into a learned genre to influence and attract pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela.

Chapter 2 is the analysis of two of Berceo's milagros: "El parto maravilloso" and "De cómo Teófilo fizo carta con el diablo de su ánima et después fue convertido e salvo".

Chapter 3 looks at the context in which Marie de France wrote her *Lais*. We observe the learned techniques as well as the popular details of her region that transform oral tales of Breton and Norman folklore into highly polished octosyllabic verses.

Chapter 4 is where we determine the mutual influences that exist in the composition of the *Lais* and *Milagros*: the importance of Antiquity in medieval texts, and popular images and refrains.

The initial goal that I proposed for this study has been accomplished to a degree. I have been able to prove that Gonzalo de Berceo and Marie de France share many similar elements in their texts. Even though they were both writing in different centuries and regions, and about different subjects, it is obvious that the "Camino de Santiago" played a large role in the exchange of cultural traits and historical events. I have only just begun to scratch the surface of this vast area of study. It is my hope to continue discovering other similarities present in the works of these authors during my doctorate program at UBC.

Dedication

To my parents, Juan and Ruth Bastante and to my sister, Patricia Bastante.

Thank you for your love, encouragement and support these last two years.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Antonio Gómez-Moriana, Dr. Stephen Steele and Dr. Dolores Clavero, for their confidence in this study and for dedicating so many hours preparing the materials that were needed to teach the courses in this Special Arrangements program. My sincere thanks go to Dr. Gómez-Moriana for introducing me to Berceo's texts and to medieval Spanish literature, and Dr. Stephen Steele for introducing me to Marie de France's *Lais*. I am also grateful to Dr. Dolores Clavero for sharing her wisdom on medieval history. I am indebted to them as they were an extraordinary source of help to me; their careful reading of this study is greatly appreciated.

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Introduction

This spring I finally visited the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla. After spending two years studying and interpreting the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* it was a refreshing change to see the area where Gonzalo de Berceo wrote this celebrated text. In the sixteenth century the monastery underwent a large expansion and has since settled into the valley below the medieval monastery. The walls inside the original cloister are severely decayed and efforts are being made to stop the decomposition. There is a stark contrast between the ancient architecture and the modern wooden devices that are now holding it together. Even though time and natural elements are eroding the monastery, the texts that were produced there in the thirteenth century are still very much alive and are studied with a great enthusiasm. *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* is arguably Berceo's most important text for many reasons.

This collection of religious stories served two purposes: first, to praise the Virgin Mary, and second, to attract pilgrims to the monastery of San Millán. Because the monastery is located on the *French Pilgrim* trail, one of the many routes leading to Santiago de Compostela, it was in an advantageous position to receive many monetary donations. Foreign pilgrims would pause from their long journey at the monastery to visit the shrine of the Virgin and the place where San Millán exorcised the Devil from several parishioners in the fifth century (Olarte, 10-13). Pilgrims have been traveling to Santiago since the ninth century and in the process they would leave behind cultural and learned influences in the area. French monks, who were trying to solidify the teachings of the

Roman Church, founded the monastery in the tenth century. Before religious reforms took place, there was another form of Christianity being practiced on the Peninsula, the Mozarabic or Visigothic Liturgy. The rise of the Cult of the Virgin Mary in medieval Spain can be attributed as a merger between the Roman and the Mozarabic Liturgies.

Milagros de Nuestra Señora is credited as being one of the first poetic texts of the Spanish language. Berceo used popular elements of the Rioja region and he wrote in vernacular so that his audience would better be able to appreciate the miracles of the Virgin Mary. Since Berceo was a cleric and a notary, he also integrated into his text several elements from a learned tradition: rhetorical techniques, rigid verse structures, and Latin phrases. The original texts that Berceo used as a blueprint for his versions were from Latin sources, written in prose. Because of the language and education barriers in the Middle Ages, these original texts would not have targeted the same audience. Since the purpose of these vernacular versions was to attract people to the monastery of San Millán and save sinners through the stories of the Virgin's grace, Berceo kept his texts simple. The simplicity of his texts, however, is really an illusion since they are filled with underlying traces of the socio-political situation of the region in the thirteenth century.

Berceo used the *Mester de Clerecía* as a form of presentation for his texts. The verse structure that he chose is *Cuaderna Via*, a meter that is associated with narrative verse. Berceo uses popular tradition to attract his audience and therefore his compositions show a mixture of learned and popular elements.

Marie de France is the second composer that will be studied in this thesis. She, like Berceo, wrote a collection of texts destined for a

specific audience. Very little is known about this person, except that she has been credited as the composer of two compilations and one text: the *Lais*, the *Fables* and the *Purgatoire de Saint Patrick*. Her texts date from the twelfth century and she is believed to be from Brittany in the North of France; we also know that her name is Marie because it is mentioned at the beginning of her first *lai* in the collection. The identity of the author is not the most important factor in this study as the purpose is to draw out any similarities or differences that might exist between *Lais* and *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*.

The manuscript of *Lais* that we will be using is Harley 978, the only version that includes all twelve narratives and a prologue. The other four manuscripts that have been found all have different combinations of the twelve narratives and none of them have the prologue. Because of the discrepancy of the contents in the surviving manuscripts, critics believe that *Lais* was not performed all at once, but rather a few at a time. The narrator of the *Lais* explains that musical accompaniment was part of the presentation of these texts, a factor that would have kept the audience entertained for many hours.

Like Berceo's *Milagros*, these texts are complemented by the addition of popular details, refrains and superstitions. The original versions of the *Lais* were not from Latin texts, in fact, they were oral accounts of Norman and Breton folklore. Marie states that she is well educated in the texts of classical Antiquity but she has chosen to study the texts of her region. In the Middle Ages it was very popular to interpret the texts of classical culture and to compose a new rendition in Latin. Marie has elected to break with tradition and compose her *Lais* in a vernacular language and to treat a very different subject. Like Berceo,

she has maintained several learned factors in the composition of her text, such as rhetorical techniques and references to written accounts. To these learned techniques she adds popular details such as supernatural creatures and worlds, refrains and familiar locations. All of these incorporations form a bond with her audience and make her texts more believable.

Berceo has written about the power and grace of the Virgin Mary. His texts were meant to instruct the pilgrims that passed through San Millán de la Cogolla. What do Marie's texts show? They were written to entertain the members of an elite audience and to teach an important lesson: respect for the feudal order. The feudal hierarchy survived for so many centuries because of the loyalty established between a vassal and a lord. Another important component of the feudal hierarchy was the inheritance issue. All of these factors will be discussed in greater detail later in the following chapters.

To understand the additions of popular culture into the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* and *Lais*, I have used Mikhail Bakhtin's text *Rabelais and His World*. Even though most of his study is an analysis of François Rabelais, he has managed to create a detailed account of medieval society. He has had to consider the Middle Ages in detail to understand the social context leading up to the production of Rabelais' texts. Bakhtin's divisions between the institutions and the townspeople are valuable to my study because he claims that there are definite boundaries between these two social groups. I have been able to determine that these divisions are not as clear as he makes them seem.

Even though we do not know very much about Marie de France, it is obvious that she was part of the institutions because of her level of

education and because of her dedication of the *Lais* to an unknown King. Berceo was a member of the clergy and therefore received a compulsory education.

Chapter 1

Berceo's Influences For *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*

Gonzalo de Berceo wrote his *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* at a very peculiar time in Spanish history; he was writing when many different cultures cohabited the Iberian Peninsula thus leading to their influences in his works. The text that will be analysed in this study is of particular interest, as there are obvious signs of a French influence in the style of its composition and in the content of its ideas. *Milagros* benefits from this due to the pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela, which took place in the Northern area of the Peninsula during the Middle Ages. This pilgrimage was the birthplace of a cultural influence that appears in many works of the period and was shared with the native populations. The French elements that will be analysed in greater detail for the purpose of this study are linguistic, liturgical, genre-based and stylistic. Berceo wrote *Milagros* with the sole purpose of exalting the Virgin Mary. It has also been suggested by Brian Dutton that they may have been written for a more "divine" purpose: to convert more people to the faith, especially those who accompanied the pilgrims on their route to Compostela and the "infidels" who lived in the area.

Medieval Spain was a mixture of cultures and diverse religions and at the time Berceo wrote his *Milagros* many changes were beginning to be implemented. The Church in Rome tried to reform Christianity as it was being practised on the Iberian Peninsula. Monks from French orders

were cementing this change in religious liturgy in northern Spain. Important members of the Spanish courts supported these many foreign religious influences and therefore monasteries, which practised the Roman liturgy, were established. Berceo was a secular priest of the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla, a monastery of the Benedictine order, and it is believed that he attended the University of Palencia, a prestigious centre of study that promoted the Roman liturgy and was established by French monks (Dutton, 87). *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* echoes this situation.

The change in religious liturgy did not appear on the scene rapidly; it took many years for the process to establish itself. Before the pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela, there were two types of liturgy being practised in the Peninsula. The most common liturgy was *Mozarabic* or *Visigothic* liturgy. As opposed to the Roman version, the Hispanic liturgy was celebrated in the vernacular languages and was part of the popular culture. The Roman version was celebrated in Latin and only the priests and monks, who had studied this learned language, were able to understand the message. Because the Mozarabic liturgy contained local elements, Rome sustained that it was unholy and therefore declared it heresy (Saugnieux, 51). Islam and Judaism were perceived as threats to Christianity, and because Spain had a very high concentration of these two religions, Rome declared that the Visigothic liturgy had been tainted with negative influences and therefore should be

condemned. The arrival of French monastic orders in Spain gave Rome hope that this land would soon be rid of the threat posed by the other monotheistic religions. It is interesting that Gonzalo de Berceo would have chosen a pioneer in the Visigothic liturgy for one of the characters in his *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. He chose to dedicate the first milagro to Saint Ildefonsus of Toledo, a patriarch in the Visigothic liturgy. If the Church had been so opposed to liturgical differences in Spain, why would a clergyman living in a French monastery choose to write about the "enemy"?

Saint Ildefonsus was a familiar figure to the inhabitants of the Peninsula. He had written a work about the perpetual virginity of Mary and created a new festival dedicated to Her. This was designed to avoid what should be a joyful celebration with a time of grieving¹. The milagro dedicated to this man demonstrates that even though the common liturgy was now Roman, certain elements of the popular culture could not be erased. This topic has been widely discussed by Joël Saugnieux in his book *Berceo y las culturas del siglo XIII*. Saugnieux suggests that Berceo may have introduced this patriarch of the Mozarabic liturgy, in order to solidify the importance of the Virgin Mary. Because Saint

¹According to Michael Gerli, the editor of a particular version of the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, the Annunciation was celebrated on March 25 as it is to this day. Under St. Ildefonso's suggestions, the Council of Toledo in 656 A.D., added a new festivity for the Virgin on December 18, in order for it not to coincide with Lent, a period of mourning [79].

Ildefonsus had written about the Virgin Mary and attributes such importance to her role in the salvation of the human race, Berceo has to include this kind of devotion in his narrative. Saint Ildefonsus' religious example of devotion to Mary was something that the Roman liturgy later accepted with great fervour (Saugnieux, 69-70). The enthusiasm of the Cult of the Virgin Mary was the element that allowed the inhabitants of the Peninsula to adapt to the Roman liturgy more easily.

The problems of the Spanish Church were not as easy to solve as Rome had hoped. In Santiago de Compostela, the clergy believed that because they had the remains of the Apostle James, one of the closest persons to Christ, they would be able to have their own say in religious matters (Castro, 329-330). Even though Rome had the remains of St. Peter and St. Paul and was regarded by all other European countries as the head of the Church, the Church in Spain refused to acknowledge most of its orders. There were many disagreements between Rome and the Iberian Peninsula, which was regarded as a colony of rebels, and had an infamous reputation throughout Europe (Linehan, 3). Most of the disagreements that had taken place were related to the payment of taxes. The Spanish church, led by a headstrong hierarchy, refused to pay these dues because they were going to be used to fight the Crusades in far off lands. All of this in-fighting continued throughout most of the 11th and 12th centuries; it was finally in the 13th century that these disagreements

began to change. However, up until this time, the Church in Compostela, dictated its laws and formed its own judgements.

Durante el obispado o pontificado de Diego Gelmirez (1100-1140), periodo de máximo esplendor para Santiago, aquel magnífico personaje instauró en su corte pompa y honores pontificales; muchos los censuraban, y le recordaban "que algunos de sus antepasados habían pretendido nada menos que equipar su iglesia con la de Roma" (L. Ferreiro, III, 274). Gelmirez nombró cardenales, que vestían de púrpura; recibía a los peregrinos "Apostolico more", como si fuera, en efecto, el papa (Castro, 262).

The monks and priests, who had been forbidden to fight and carry arms by the Church in Rome, ignored these orders and even took part in battles. Many members of the religious hierarchy had concubines even though the Church in Rome had forbidden this (Linehan, 2). They also completely disregarded the dress code; they all had beards and wore "every-man" clothing.

Acostumbraban éstos a no usar ropas talares; llevaban barba y andaban armados. Lo sabemos porque todas esas costumbres se censuran y se prohíben en los concilios compostelanos de 1060 y 1063: "Los obispos y clérigos usarán ropas talares. . . estarán tonsurados y se cortarán la barba. . . no llevarán armas" (Castro, 355).

The priests and monks in the Iberian Peninsula were of a rebellious nature and that is the way that Berceo has chosen to represent most of them in his work. The majority of the characters in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* are from the ecclesiastical order and most of them are involved in worldly sins. The most common image to appear in Berceo's is the drunken monk (8).

De otro miraclo	vos querría contar
que cuntió en un monge	de ábito reglar;
quísolo el diablo	durament espantar,
mas la Madre gloriosa	sópogelo vedar.

Desque fo enna orden,	bien deques fo novicio,
amó a la Gloriosa	siempre facer servicio;
guardóse de follía,	de fablar en fornicio,
pero ovo en cabo	de caer en un vicio.

Entró enna bodega	un día por ventura,
bebió mucho del vino,	esto fo sin mesura,
emebebdóse el locco,	issió de su cordura,
yogó hasta las viésporas	sobre la tierra dura.

(Stanzas 461-463)²

² The English translations of the stanzas used in this study will be taken from Gonzalo de Berceo's *Miracles of Our Lady*. Richard Terry Mount and Annette Grant Cash have translated this text from Spanish into English and the University Press of Kentucky printed it in 1997.

I would like to tell you about another miracle
that happened to a monk of a religious order:
the Devil wanted to frighten him severely,
but the Glorious Mother knew how to impede him.

Ever since he was in the order, indeed ever since he was a novice
he had loved the Glorious One, always doing Her service;
he guarded against craziness, or speaking of fornication,
but he finally fell into vice.

He entered the wine cellar by chance one day,
he drank a great deal of wine, this was without moderation.
The crazy man got drunk; he lost his sanity,
until vespers he lay on the hard ground

(Stanzas 461-463)

Images of drunkenness and the like were very common and familiar to the audience that the *Milagros* were targeting; however, they were also an indication of life in the Iberian Peninsula during the years of transition in liturgy. It has been suggested that Berceo wrote his *Milagros* in order to tastefully point out what was wrong with his society (Keller, 25-26). By looking at all of the religious characters in his text, it can simply be concluded that the Spanish clergy was in need of some kind of religious control and strict rules, something that the French orders were willing to offer. Berceo could very well be making a social comment about the hypocrisy of the Church in matters such as these; preaching order to the flock and then sinning in private. Even though the Church in Rome had created numerous barriers for its clergy, the Church in Spain had a different set of rules.

I believe that Berceo is not making a harsh comment on the lack of morals of the clergy. He is simply stating a reality and he is not trying to force a new doctrine upon the monks and priests; rather, he suggests that the members of the clergy are humans as well, and like all sinners, can be offered forgiveness. These characters are offered salvation from their earthly mistakes through the understanding and pity of the Virgin Mary. It is by Her grace that they will be saved. Berceo does not criticise his characters severely, instead, he mentions how foolish they are to have neglected their religious example.

Un fraire de su casa,	Guiralt era clamado,
ante que fuesse monge	era non bien senado:
facié a las debeces	follía e peccado,
como omne soltero	que non es apremiado.

(Stanza 183)³

En Colonna la rica,	cabeza de regnado,
avié un monasterio	de Sant Peidro clamado;
avié en él un monge	assaz mal ordenado,
de lo que diz la regla	avié pocco cuidado.

Era de pocco seso,	facié mucha locura,
porque lo castigavan	non avié nulla cura;
cuntió'l en est comedio	muy grand desventura:
parió una bagassa	d'él una creatura.

(Stanzas 160-161)⁴

³ A friar of his house who was called Guiralt
before becoming a monk was not very wise;
sometimes he committed the folly and sin
of an unmarried man without obligations
(Stanza 183)

⁴ In rich Cologne, a royal capital,
there was a monastery called Saint Peter's;
therein lived and undisciplined monk
who cared very little for what the rule says.

He had very little sense, he committed much foolishness;
although they punished him, he was incorrigible;
because of this a great misfortune befell him:
a harlot bore a child from him.

(Stanzas 160-161)

Because Berceo is not making direct attacks against these religious characters in his *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, it could be possible that there were clergymen in his audience. It would be strange indeed if he did not instil some kind of religious message in his *Milagros* because he was a secular priest who lived in the cloister of a Benedictine monastery and he is treating the subject of salvation through the intercession of Mary. It has been suggested that the *Milagros* were a commissioned work (Keller, 25) and therefore it is safe to assume that he was not making a direct attack about the lack of morals in the church, rather it was his patron who was in charge of making the criticism.

If one were to look for social criticism in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, one would find it in the treatment of the Jewish population that co-existed in the same space as the Christians. The Church in Rome regarded the Jewish and Islamic peoples living on the Iberian Peninsula as a threat because of their religions and their customs. The three religions were sharing the same space and there was very little evidence of tensions among them until the 15th century. In the major cities of the time, such as Toledo – a centre for translation of texts - there are obvious influences of the three cultures in the architecture of the city as well as other works of art. There were specific cultural districts within the city and barriers did not separate the citizens. People had to deal with each other in businesses and on the streets. Anti-Semitism began to surface in the writings of the thirteenth century and perhaps even earlier due to

the differing opinions of the immigrants and visitors from other European countries. These foreign ideas became more apparent when the Church in Rome formed an interest in creating a "Bula de la Santa Cruzada"⁵ that would help eliminate the non-Christian religions of the Iberian Peninsula. The European countries, mostly funded by monies and knights from France, contributed to a "Holy" War in this "heathen" land, which changed the co-existence that had once taken place there. Once the French religious orders became established in northern Spain, this dislike toward other religious groups became more apparent.

Anti-Semitism in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*

The *Milagros* are filled with indirect and many times direct anti-Semitic feelings. Berceo uses images and language in order to make his point. He refers to the stereotypes of the moneylender and the assumption that Judaism is a dangerous religion. He believes that all Jewish people work for the Devil and are pursuing the soul of the Christian. Berceo uses defamatory language and terms when he describes the Jewish characters in his *Milagros*. Curiously enough, he makes no reference to the Islamic peoples, who were still present on the Peninsula. He refers to a Jewish character in his *Milagro XVI*, "El

⁵ This bull was launched to save the Iberian Peninsula from the threat of Islam. French and other European troops took part in the Reconquista which ended in the battle of Navas de Tolosa in 1212 (Linehan, 5; García de Cortázar, 145).

judezno", denigrating him as a "can traïdor" (Stanza 362a)⁶ and as a "falso descreido" (Stanza 363a)⁷. Because this character would not allow his son to attend the Christian Church, Berceo treats the father in an even more violent fashion. When it is this character's turn to receive his punishment for trying to kill his son in an oven, the narrator says the following.

Prisieron al judío,	al falsso desleal,
al que a su fijuelo	fiziera tan grand mal,
legáronli las manos	con un fuerte dogal,
dieron con elli entro	en el fuego cabdal.

Quanto contarié omne	poccas de pepiones,
en tanto fo tornado	cenisa e carbones,
non dizién por su alma	salmos nin oraciones,
mas dizién denosteos	e grandes maldiziones.

(Stanzas 371-372)⁸

⁶ "treacherous dog" (Stanza 362a)

⁷ "the false disbeliever" (Stanza 363a)

⁸ They seized the Jew, the false disloyal one,
the one who had done such a great wrong to his little son;
they tied his hands with a strong rope
and they cast him into a great fire.

In the time it would take someone to count a few pennies,
he was turned into ashes and embers;
they did not say psalms or prayers for his soul,
rather they hurled insults and great curses.

(Stanzas 371-372)

The Jewish characters in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* are of great importance because they form a part of the society in which Berceo lived and also because they were treated in an extremely negative manner. Even though this theme only appears in five of the twenty-five milagros, it clearly demonstrates the way Berceo regarded this social group.

During the Middle Ages, the Jewish population was not regarded kindly. Many stereotypes began to surface in the collective memory of society, and some had to do with the merchant classes. The Church had mixed feelings about this particular social class because it was involved in the trade of goods, and, particularly, usury. Monetary gain was believed to be one of the worst sins, leading to greed and the eventual distance from religious beliefs. Christian usurers were chastised publicly by the Church and other members of the society because it was forbidden in the New Testament to increase their wealth at the cost of others, especially by using God's gift of time (Gurevich, 279). There was no religious law that forbade the Jewish community from participating in this trade, therefore they established a system that was used by them and the Christians in their cities. The irony of Jewish money-lending extended farther than expected: it financed the battles of the Christian kings in the Iberian Peninsula.

Sobre el papel económico de los judíos habría mucho que decir. El siglo XII corresponde en las finanzas castellanas a un período de crisis: los Almorávides se niegan a pagar las parías que los reyes de taifas entregaban a los cristianos, y los monarcas, que necesitaban dinero para llevar a cabo sus guerras, establecen un nuevo impuesto, la «monada forera».

Para cobrarlo utilizan nuevos agentes fiscales, los judíos, que ya desempeñaban este papel entre los moros. Los judíos, dedicándose frecuentemente a la usura, disponían de importantes sumas realizables en el acto, con lo que podían prestar inmediatamente al rey la cifra fijada, cobrando ellos más tarde los impuestos (Saugnieux, 94).

Usury became more common in the 12th and 13th centuries as merchants became more dominant in the worldly hierarchy of the Middle Ages. It is probably for this reason that Berceo placed the stereotypical character of the moneylender in his collection of milagros. The Milagro XXIII, "El Mercader Flado", presents an example of the new emerging social class and the attitudes of the clergy toward it in the XIII century. Berceo portrays the two different types of merchants that existed in this era: the "honest" Christian, who works very hard in order to achieve his wealth and must travel great distances and possibly endure great dangers; and the "lazy" moneylender who increases his fortune by charging interest. Gurevich mentions the difficulties that the merchants had to endure on their expeditions and this is why the clergy later accepted the merchant class.

They had to take their caravans into far-off lands, make their way among the alien races and populations, and confront all imaginable dangers, from marauders to local lords more like brigands who did their best to get their hands on the merchants' wealth either by charging them exorbitant customs duties or simply relieving them of their merchandise and earnings. The merchants had to withstand storms at sea and all the trials of land transport over nearly impassable roads (244).

Berceo begins Milagro XXIII with a description of the Christian merchant. He tells about this man's generosity and how he had given away all he

owned to others less fortunate than himself. Once he has lost all of his wealth, he turns to a moneylender in order to improve his lifestyle. With the borrowed money, he embarks on a trading expedition to a distant land. The moneylender stays in the town and becomes angry when the merchant does not repay his debt. Berceo approves of the merchant in this milagro as he does not criticize him for wanting more money, and thus demonstrates the evolution of medieval thought and priorities. He has a very interesting way of describing the moneylender in the same milagro. He portrays him as a likeable character, but once his "greedy tendencies" begin to surface, the description takes a sharply negative turn. He also contrasts this character with the Christian, who is hardworking and charitable.

Un judío bien rico	avié enna cibdat,
non avié d'él más rico	en essa vezindat:
asmó de ir a elli	entre su voluntat,
demandarli consejo	por Dios a caridat.

Fo luego al judío	e fo bien recibido,
demandó'l cómo andava,	por qué era venido,
ca de otras sazones	lo avié conocido
e todo el su pleito	bien lo avié oído.

(Stanzas 636-637)⁹

⁹ There was in the city a very rich Jew,
there was no richer a man in the vicinity;
he decided to go to him
to ask his advice for God and charity's sake.

There he went to the Jew and was well received,
the Jew asked him how he was and why he had come,
for he had known him in other times

El trufán alevoso,	natura cobdiciosa,
non metié el astroso	mientes en otra cosa;
tenié que su ventura	era maravillosa,
púsoli al burgés	nomne 'boca mintrosa'.

Reptávalo la aljama,	essa mala natura,
que perdió so aver	por su mala locura;
nunqua omne non fizo	tan loca fiadura,
que priso por fianza	una imagen dura.

Dessemos al judío,	goloso e logrero,
no lo saque Dios ende,	aguarde so cellero,
fablemos su vegada	del pleit del mercadero,
levémosli las nuevas	do ribó el tablero.

(Stanzas 679-681)¹⁰

and had indeed heard all his concerns.
(Stanzas 636-637)

- ¹⁰ The treacherous rogue, greedy by nature,
(he who is vile thinks of nothing else)
considered that his good fortune was marvelous;
he called the burgher "liar".

The Jew, those ill-tempered ones, reproached him
for he had lost his money due to his very madness;
never had any one accepted so senseless a surety
as to take as a guarantor a hard statue.

Let us leave the Jew, greedy and usurious.
Let God not take him out of there; let him guard his larder.
Let us talk instead about the merchant's affairs;
Let us bring him the news of where the chest made shore
(Stanzas 679-681)

The last stanza demonstrates to the modern reader how Berceo transfers his attention from the Jewish character to the Christian. By this action he is showing that this character is not worthy of narrative space.

Another anti-Semitic thread is the descriptions of Jewish characters as helpers of Satan in the war against the Christian. All of Berceo's Jewish characters are described as having some kind of demonic quality; most of them are working in conjunction with the Devil to steal the soul of the Christian. They are associated with witchcraft and occult ceremonies. Saugnieux mentions that there were two different kinds of anti-Semitism in Berceo's Spain: economic and religious. We have already explored economic anti-Semitism when we studied the case of the moneylender in the previous paragraph. Religious anti-Semitism appears in most of the milagros; this takes into account the fact that the Jewish community rejects Christ as the Messiah (75-76). Another component to religious anti-Semitism is the belief by Christians that the Jewish community was collectively guilty of Christ's death (and hence, of deicide), a belief that was officially endorsed by the Vatican until 1961. This is the most obvious form of anti-Semitism present in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. In Milagro XVIII, "Cristo y los judíos de Toledo", the Virgin Mary appears to the Bishop of Toledo to warn him and the congregation that the Jewish community is practising witchcraft with a wax statue moulded in the image of Christ. The violence, initiated by the

words of the Virgin Mary, leads to the destruction of the Jewish neighbourhood by the Christians.

Fablólis voz del cielo,	dolient e querellosa,
"Oíd -dixo- christianos	una estranna cosa,
la gent de judaísmo,	sorda e cegajosa,
nunqua contra don Christo	non fo más porfiosa.

Secundo que nos dizen	las sanctas escripturas,
fizieron en don Christo	muy grandes travesuras;
tajava essa cuita	a mí las assaduras,
mas en ellos quebraron	todas las sus locuras.

(Stanzas 416-417)¹¹

Moviéronse los pueblos,	toda la clereçia,
fueron a muy grand priessa	por la judería;
guñólos Jesu Christo	e la Virgo María,
fo luego escubierta	la su alevosia.

¹¹ A voice from Heaven spoke, pained and angry:
it said: "Hear, Christians, a remarkable thing!
The Jewish people, deaf and blind,
have never been so wicked to Lord Jesus!

As the Holy Scriptures tell us,
the committed iniquities against Lord Christ,
that sorrow cut to My heart;
but all their madness had repercussions for them.
(Stanzas 416-417)

Fallaron enna casa del ravi más onrado
 un grand cuerpo de ceracomo omne formado,
 como don Christo sovo, sedié crucificado,
 con grandes clavos preso, grand plaga al costado.

Quanta fonta fizieron en el nuestro Sennor
 alli la fazién toda por nuestra desonor,
 recabdáronlos luego, mas non con grand savor,
 qual fazién tal prisieron, ¡grado al Criador!

Fueron bien recabdados los que prender podieron,
 diéronlis yantar mala qual ellos merecieron,
 ý fizieron "Tu autem", mala muerte prisieron,
 después lo entendieron que mal seso fiçieron.

(Stanzas 426-429)¹²

¹² The people and all the clergy moved.
 In great haste they went to the Jewish sector.
 Jesus Christ guided them so did the Virgin Mary,
 and their treachery was soon discovered.

They found in the house the most honorable rabbi
 and a large body of wax shaped like a man.
 It was like Jesus Christ; it was crucified,
 held with large nails, and had a great wound in its side.

What outrage they committed against our Lord.
 There they did it all to our dishonor!
 They executed them immediately, but not with pleasure.
 They got what they deserved, thanks be to the Creator!

Those who could be caught were executed.
 They were given a bad meal, which they deserved.
 There they said "Tu autem"; they received a vile death.
 Afterwards they understood they had committed madness.
 (Stanzas 426-429)

In all of his milagros dealing with Jewish characters, Berceo makes sure that the Christians triumph in the end. He demonstrates to the modern reader the anti-Semitic sentiments of his monastery in the thirteenth century.

Milagro XXV “ De cómo Teófilo fizo carta con el diablo de su ánima et después fue convertido e salvo”¹³, shows how the Jewish character is presented by means of shady descriptions and in questionable situations. He is the recruiter of souls for the Devil and fools Teófilo into giving away his soul in exchange for the respect he once had.

Era el trufán falsso	pleno de malos vicios,
savié encantamientos	e <i>muchos maleficios</i> ;
fazié el malo cercos	e otros artificios,
Belzebud lo guiava	en todos sus oficios.

En dar consejos malos	era muy sabidor,
matava muchas almas	el falsso traïdor;
como era basallo	de muy mal sennor
si él mal lo mandava	él faziélo peor.

(Stanzas 767-768)¹⁴

¹³ This particular edition of the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* by Michael Gerli has placed this milagro as the last one in the collection, as it was originally intended. In other editions of the *Milagros*, it is milagro XXIV. Critics believe that “La iglesia despojada” (milagro XXIV in this edition) was added after Berceo originally completed *Milagros*.

¹⁴ The false trickster was full of evil vices,
he knew enchantments and many machinations.
The evil one drew circles and did other artifices;
Beelzebub guided him in all his work.

Popular elements are integrated into this milagro, such as superstitions regarding crossroads and the middle of the night. At a crossroads evil could win over good and occult deals were made with the Devil. Such is the case with Teófilo, who is led to a crossroads by the Jewish character to sign a pact with the Devil.

Prísolo por la mano,	la nochi bien mediada,
sacólo de la villa	a una cruzejada;
disso'l: "Non te santigues	nin te temas de nada,
ca toda tu fazienda	será cras mejorada."

Vío a poca de ora	venir muy grandes yentes
con ciriales en manos	e con cirios ardientes,
con su reñ en medio	feos, ca non luzientes:
¡Ya querrié don Teófilo	seer con sus parientes!

(Stanzas 778-779)¹⁵

He was very knowledgeable in giving bad advice.
The false traitor carried off many souls;
as he was the vassal of a very evil lord;
if ordered to do evil, he did even worse.

(Stanzas 767-768)

- ¹⁵ He took him by the hand, in the middle of the night,
and led him out of town to a crossroads.
He told him, "Do not cross yourself or fear anything,
for your whole affair will be improved tomorrow."

Soon he saw many great people come
with candelabra and burning candles in hand,
ugly and not shining, with their king in the midst.
Now Sir Theophilus wished he were with his kin!

(Stanzas 778-779)

The anti-Semitic sentiment in the *Milagros* is a sign that it was also a part of the popular culture. Even though this is present in the text, Joël Saugnieux is not certain of the extent of anti-Semitism within Spanish society in the thirteenth century. He believes that Berceo was tainted by the ideologies disseminated at his monastery and that the degree of anti-Semitism on the Peninsula was not as strong as the rest of Europe until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (79, 92). It is interesting to note that the original Latin texts on which Berceo based his milagros do not contain direct attacks on the Jewish characters. Berceo has single-handedly elaborated these elements for the purpose of influencing his public and marginalizing the Jewish community.

Because there are Latin sources that precede Berceo's versions of *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, it is uncertain whether he can be labelled the *author* of the text. Berceo has "translated" the original versions of the *Milagros* from Latin sources, but he has added many elements to make them more relevant to his audience. The confusion over the term *author* refers to the modern concept, as the creator and thus the owner of his or her ideas. Paul Zumthor, explains in *Essai de poétique médiévale*, the differences between the concepts of "text" and "work" (73-75). A "work" is the first version, the original version of a story or poem; the "text" is all of the variations that have been composed from the original "work"¹⁶. In the case of the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, Berceo has taken a "work" and written a "text" version of the original form. His

¹⁶ This is a reversal of the terminology employed by Ingarden in *The Literary Work of Art*. His original version of a story would be considered a "text" and the different versions of the original would be considered a "work" (21-26).

detailed renditions of the twenty-five *Milagros* have created much amusement and insight into the popular culture that existed in the Middle Ages. These details which have embellished the Latin version, clearly demonstrate the contact of the narrator with an audience whom he addresses in most of his vignettes. Unlike “original” Latin pieces that were more than likely meant for the eyes and ears of the monks and priests in the monasteries, Berceo’s versions demonstrate a rapport with an audience which was probably filled with townspeople, clergy and pilgrims on their way to Compostela.

In the Middle Ages the author was usually not the creator of ideas or the themes; he or she was the mouthpiece of an existing tradition. In the case of Gonzalo de Berceo, the narrator admits that there are other versions of the *milagros* stories.

Diziénli ldefonso,	dizlo la escriptura,
pastor que a su grey	dava buena pastura,
omne de sancta vida	que trasco grand cordura,
que nos mucho digamos,	so fecho lo mestura.

(Stanza 49)¹⁷

Leemos de un clérigo	que era tiestherido,
ennos vicios seglares	ferament embevido;
peroque era loco,	avié un buen sentido,
amava la Gloriosa	de corazón complido.

(Stanza 101)¹⁸

¹⁷ According to the text, they called him Ildephonsus, a shepherd who gave his flock good pasture, a holy man who possessed great wisdom; all that we may say his deeds reveal.

(Stanza 49)

D'un clérigo otro	nos diz la escriptura
que de Sancta María	amava su figura:
siempre se inclinava	contra la su pintura
avié muy grand vergüenza	de la su catadura.

(Stanza 116)¹⁹

Berceo is proud of his compilation and his translations of these particular milagros but admits that he did not record them originally. He clearly demonstrates the medieval tradition of *auctoritas*. This concept, which derives from classical rhetoric, involves the medieval writer's interpretation of the original work. He or she is given the "authority" to do this by the author of Antiquity, who expects future generations to study and render an explanation of the original. In the case of Berceo, the original works are embellished with details from the popular culture of the age, elements that would make the stories relevant to his audience.

The popular culture in Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* has its roots in the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, a cult-following in Europe during the Middle Ages. Américo Castro, in his book *La realidad*

¹⁸ We read of a cleric who was crackbrained,
and deeply absorbed in worldly vices;
but although he was foolish he had one saving grace:
he loved the Glorious One with all his heart.
(Stanza 101)

¹⁹ The book tells us of another cleric
who loved the image of Holy Mary;
he always bowed before her painting,
and felt very great shame under her gaze.

histórica de España, explains the importance of this pilgrimage and the cult-following of the Apostle. The Holy Spirit told St. James, that he should go and preach the gospel in the Iberian Peninsula. As an obedient servant, he followed these exact orders and lived many years of his life there. Later he returned to Palestine where he was killed (Castro 259). His body was taken back to Spain, where he was finally laid to rest in Santiago de Compostela. He is the patron saint of Spain because he brought Christianity to the Iberian Peninsula and he helped defeat the Islamic armies on the battlefields. According to popular belief, Santiago was seen descending from heaven on a chariot driven by two white horses, and taking part in the Battle of Clavijo in 822 A.D. He, along with Christian soldiers, took part in a "Holy" war in order to free the land from a religious threat. The Apostle James is often depicted as a warrior. As a result of this he is portrayed with a sword in sculptures and paintings. In these artistic representations he is seen decapitating Islamics with his sword, as they are crushed by his horses. The image of the bellicose saint accounts for the armed priests of the Iberian Peninsula.

Castro mentions that the pilgrimages would attract many people to Santiago, he describes the atmosphere as chaotic.

En la ciudad apostólica era continuo el rumor de extrañas
lenguas y el espectáculo abigarrado de una inquieta
muchedumbre. Dentro del templo, siempre abierto, había

que imponer orden a la caterva de peregrinos, que, a empellones, pugnaba por instalarse cerca de la tumba sagrada. Los distintos grupos, según antes se ha visto, lucharon a veces entre sí para gozar del ansiado privilegio, y no era raro, además, que dejaran en la ciudad gérmenes de pestilencias asoladoras. Príncipes, grandes señores, mercaderes, mendigos y truhanes, en confuso revoltijo, adoraban al Apóstol y ofrecían donativos, cuya vigilancia y manejo daba gran tarea a los canónigos-cardenales. Cada peregrino recibía testimonio escrito de su estancia, y compraba la concha o venera, símbolo del Apóstol, cuya venta constituía negocio importante para centenares de mercaderes. El alojamiento de aquella masa inquieta, y la gerencia de las riquezas allegadas, tuvo en constante ajeteo a clérigos y seglares, y produjo frecuentes conflictos entre la Iglesia y los burgueses. Añádese a ello el ejercicio caballeresco de los clérigos, obligados a ir a la hueste cuando el rey los requeria, puesto que el sacerdote era al mismo tiempo hombre de armas. El sentimiento religioso iba entremezclado con burocracia, milicia, liturgia, pleitos y finanzas (Castro, 317-318).

Castro's evocation of the pilgrimage to Compostela shows its importance for the economic well-being of the city and its citizens. It also demonstrates that the clergy was not as different as the state in their priorities.

Mikhail Bakhtin's Descriptions of Carnival

The popular culture of the Middle Ages is a vast area of study, and has been examined in great detail by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) in his book *Rabelais and His World*. To fully understand Bakhtin's reasoning, and how it can be applied to *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, one must become acquainted with his theories of *carnival*, *official* and *popular* culture, *grotesque* and the *material lower-body stratum*. Medieval society, according to Bakhtin, must be divided into two different areas: the *official culture*, which refers to the institutions, the Church and the

State; and the *popular culture* which refers to the townspeople who "rebel" against the institutions during the time of carnival. Bakhtin describes the Church as being a very serious institution that eliminated the joyful spirit that was present in the ancient cultures before it began to control society with its rules.

Laughter was eliminated from religious cult, from feudal and state ceremonials, etiquette and from all genres of high speculation. [...] The very contents of medieval ideology - asceticism, sombre providentialism, sin, atonement, suffering, as well as the character of the feudal regime, with its oppression and intimidation - all of these elements determined this tone of icy petrified seriousness.[...] Fear, religious awe, humility, these were the overtones of this seriousness (Bakhtin, 73).

The *popular culture* is exemplified by city folk who were looking for opportunities to escape the rigidity of society in an atmosphere of laughter; such as the one present during *Carnival*. The medieval carnival occurred before Lent and was the period that allowed the whole town to relax from the strict hold imposed by the institutions. Carnival allowed spectacular feasts and other activities to take place, and during this time, laughter was encouraged.

Degradation is achieved by transforming these mysteries [plays put on by the people] into festive scenes of eating and drinking. Laughter must liberate the gay truth of the world from the veils of gloomy lies spun by the seriousness of fear, suffering, and violence (Bakhtin, 174).

Laughter is the essential element for the atmosphere of Carnival to work and for the townspeople and the peasants to be completely free from the institutions.

Another topic that Bakhtin discusses with much enthusiasm is the importance of *the grotesque* which involves the demystification of something sacred. The only time medieval society was permitted to mock the Church, death and God was during the time of *Carnival*. This festivity is a renewing event for the Russian theorist because people could be free from the hold of the institutions. It celebrates the “pagan” roots of humanity and the laughter that was taken away by the seriousness of the *official culture*.

Carnival's hell represents the earth which swallows up and gives birth, it is often transformed into a cornucopia; the monster, death, become pregnant. Various deformities, such as protruding bellies, enormous noses, or humps, are symptoms of pregnancy or of procreative power. Victory over fear is not its abstract elimination; it is a simultaneous uncrowning and renewal, a gay transformation (Bakhtin, 91).

The demystification of something sacred, to render it *grotesque*, can be seen in many different forms. Bakhtin mentions on several occasions that priests and monks would participate in some of the events during the time of *Carnival*, and would write parodies of sacred texts.

The influence of carnival spirit was irresistible; it made a man renounce his official state as a monk, cleric, scholar, and perceive the world in its laughing aspect. Not only schoolmen and minor clerics but hierarchs and learned theologians indulged in gay recreation as relaxation from pious seriousness. . . . Confined to their cells, monks produced parodies or semiparodies of learned treatises and other droll Latin compositions (13).

Most priests and monks joined monasteries when they were children and so they did not have an opportunity to decide if they wanted this future. *Carnival* allowed them to rebel against the Church's rigid rules. Bakhtin blames the Church for taking away primitive activities and laughter,

however, he contradicts himself, as he mentions that the ecclesiastical hierarchy also participated in events during Carnival. To demonstrate more evidence of the Church's participation in the festivities, priests performed mock services.

We know that defecation played a considerable role in the ritual of the "feast of fools". During the solemn service sung by the bishop-elect, excrement was used instead of incense. After the service the clergy rode in carts loaded with dung; they drove through the streets tossing it at the crowd. (147)

Another of its expressions is the "feast of the ass" commemorating Mary's flight to Egypt with the infant Jesus. The center of this feast is neither Mary nor Jesus, although a young girl with an infant takes part in it. The central protagonist is the ass and its braying. Special "asinine masses" were celebrated. An *officium* of this mass composed by the austere churchman Pierre Corbeille has been preserved. Each part of the mass was accompanied by the comic braying, "hinham!" At the end of the service, instead of the usual blessing, the priest repeated the braying three times, and the final Amen was replaced by the same cry (78).

Berceo, like the examples given here by Bakhtin, was not a cleric who fits perfectly into the description of a member of the *official* culture. *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* is a sacred text about the salvation of sinners through the grace of the Virgin Mary, yet it is filled with humour and popular elements. Berceo never parodies the Scriptures or sacred prayers; he does however, turn the Virgin Mary into a comical figure on several occasions.

Signs of Popular Culture in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*

The *Milagros* are filled with popular images from folkloric tales and this helps Berceo's audience to visualise much better the events of the

text. Not only has Berceo used popular images, but he has also chosen the vernacular language for his public to understand him easily. The use of common language and images are not what one would expect from a university-educated cleric, as clerics were proud of their advanced level of education. What is even more striking is the application of these elements to the sacred characters in his text, namely the Virgin Mary.

“Don fol malastrugado torpe e enloquido,
 ¿en qué ruidos andas? ¿en qué eres caído?
 semejas ervolado, que as yervas bevido,
 o que eres del blago de Sant Martín tannido.

(Stanza 340)²⁰

Berceo also borrows popular carnival events and integrates them into his text. He refers to the carnival-type beatings on two occasions; in Milagro XX, “El monje embriagado”, and Milagro XXIV, “La iglesia despojada”. Bakhtin describes beating as another example of freedom through laughter, through the carnivalization of an elected king. Beating a representation of a member of the *official culture* allowed the townspeople to relieve the tensions created by the institutions.

In such a system the king is the clown. He is elected by all the people and is mocked by all the people. He is abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over, just as the carnival dummy of winter or the dying year is mocked, beaten, torn to pieces, burned, or even drowned in our time. . . . The abuse and thrashings are equivalent to a change in

²⁰ “You ill-fated, stupid, crazy fool!
 What predicament are you in? What have you fallen into?
 You seem poisoned, as if you have drunk herbs
 or have been touched with Saint Martin’s Staff.
 (Stanza 340)

costume, to a metamorphosis. Abuse reveals the other, true face of the abused, it tears off his disguise and mask. It is the king's uncrowning (197).

In order to make his public visualise something familiar to them, Berceo refers to their collective memories but takes it a step further. He asks them to visualise the Virgin Mary beating the Devil. The beating of anything during the time of carnival was an activity that would degrade the *official culture*, or the institutions, and celebrate the *popular culture*. This image is used to demonstrate the power of the Virgin Mary over the Devil in Milagro XX.

Abés podió el monge
veno Sancta María
con un palo en mano
metióselis delante,

la palabra complir,
como solía venir,
pora'l león ferir,
empeçó a dezir:

“¿Don falso alevoso,
mas yo vos daré oy
ante lo compraredes
con quien volvistes guerra

non vos escarmentades?
lo que vos demandades;
que d'aquend vos vayades,
quiero que lo sepades.”

Empezóli a dar	de grandes palancadas,
non podién las menudas	escuchar las granadas,
lazrava el león	a buenas dinaradas,
non ovo en sus días	las cuestas tan sovadas.

(Stanzas 476-478)²¹

Berceo mentions another beating in Milagro XXIV, however, this time it is the town members who participate and not the Virgin.

Fueron luego venidos	grand turma de peones,
entregaron en la elesia,	trovaron los ladrones;
menentráronlos luego	como vinién fellones,
darlís grandes feridas	con muy grandes bastones.

Dávanlís grandes palos	e grandes carrelladas,
coces muchas sobejo	e muchas palancadas;
levavan por los cuerpos	tantas de las granadas
que todas las menudas	lís eran olvidadas.

(Stanzas 725-726)²²

²¹ Scarcely could the monk complete the words,
Holy Mary came as She was accustomed to come,
with a stick in her hand to strike the lion.
She put Herself in the middle and began to say,

"Sir false traitor, you do not learn a lesson,
but I will give you today what you are asking,
before you go away from here you will pay,
I want you to know with whom you make war."

She began to give him great blows,
the big blows drowned out the small,
the lion roared loudly;
he never in his life had his sides so beaten.

(Stanzas 476-478)

It is obvious that Berceo wanted to keep his audience entertained. Through the integration of popular elements, such as the ones we have observed, we can see that the *official culture* was not as rigid as Bakhtin makes it seem.

Representations of Devils in Berceo's Text

Other popular images to appear in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* are of Purgatory, Hell and the devils. As Bakhtin describes in *Rabelais and His World*, the concept of Hell and the devils was not as frightening in the Middle Ages as it was later in the 17th to the 19th centuries. These images, although supposedly negative, were synonymous with laughter and the amusing events of Carnival: Hell was closely associated with the banquets, feasting and anything that was directly related to the body; the image of the Devil was usually a comical one, and this is evident in Berceo's descriptions of them throughout the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. Even though Berceo does not describe Hell in his narratives, he dedicates a lot of effort to the descriptions of devils. Devils are not macabre, they are treated as villains who are unable to win the battle for the soul of the sinner. The devils have amusing dialogues with the Virgin Mary and they are depicted as witty. Because they were not associated

22 Then a great crowd of people came.
They entered the church and found the thieves.
Then they attacked them as the felons emerged,
giving them hard blows with big sticks.

They hit them with great sticks and great blows to the face,
and many numerous kicks and many blows with crossbars.
they raised so many great welts on their bodies
that the small ones were forgotten.

(Stanzas 725-726)

with fear, many medieval activities took place with the portrayal of devils. The best-known event was the election of a towns-person to act the role of the Devil and play tricks on the citizens (382). This contribution to carnival was another welcome release from the seriousness of the institutions. Berceo portrays his devils in a comical manner, one of his best examples can be found in Milagro II “El sacristán fornicario”. Here his devils play kick-ball with the soul of the sinner.

Mientras que los diábolos	la trayén com a pella,
vidiéronla los ángeles,	descendieron a ella,
ficiéron los diábolos	luego muy grand querella,
que suya era quita,	que se partiessen d'ella.

(Stanza 86)²³

Devils appear in Purgatory to take the soul of the sinner back to Hell, but before returning to their home, they take advantage of “punishing” their prey. In Milagro X “Los dos hermanos”, the devils pinch and wound the sinners, and they offer them vinegar and smoke for food .

Prisiéronlo por tienllas	los guerreros antigos,
Los que siempre nos fueron	mortales enemigos,
Dávanli por pitanza	non mazanas non figos,
Mas fumo e vinagre,	feridas e pelcigos.

(Stanza 246)²⁴.

²³ While the devils were carrying it like a ball,
the angels saw it and came down to it.
The devils then made a very long argument:
that it did not belong to the angels and they should get away from it.
(Stanza 86)

²⁴ The ancient warriors took him in bonds,
those who always were our mortal enemies;

These descriptions are not frightening, and they correspond to Bakhtin's analysis regarding the festivities of carnival. These comical creatures bring more life into the original Latin texts.

Death and Rebirth

Bakhtin portrays death as a rebirth. The reversal of the social roles leads to the inversion of the *upper* and *lower stratum*. Bakhtin describes the importance of these terms in respect to the theories of Carnival. The *lower-body stratum* represents the materiality of the body; more concretely, birth, defecation, both of which renew. Bakhtin describes the importance of these divisions with respect to imagery that was created in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Banquets are joyous events and they are depicted with images of excessive eating, vomiting, defecation and birth.

The theme of abundance of material goods is here directly linked with Mardi Gras, when the salting of the slaughtered oxen is to be done. Mardi Gras is Shrove Tuesday. A carnivalesque atmosphere permeates the entire episode; it ties into one grotesque knot the slaughter, the dismemberment and disemboweling, bodily life, abundance, fat, the banquet, merry improprieties, and finally childbirth (222).

they gave him for his portion, not apples or figs,
but smoke and vinegar, wounds and pinches.
(Stanza 246)

The *lower-body stratum* has also become a major component in the theory of *the grotesque*. Bakhtin applies his theory of the glorification of the body and its functions to the importance of life. The *lower-body stratum* creates and renews through the body. The *upper-body stratum* involves the mind and very little renewal is possible there. Hell is typically associated with the *lower-body stratum* and heaven is associated with the *upper-body stratum*. Hell and devils are considered renewing factors of the lower-body stratum, much like the carnivals and laughter. Heaven on the other hand is not nearly as amusing as Hell because it is ruled by reason. There is no possibility of renewal in heaven as there is a complete exclusion of positive creative forces. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin describes the different shifts that can occur in the *lower-body stratum*. What may seem to be dirty and useless, like excrement, is received by the earth, and then it creates new life, thus keeping the renewal cycle moving in a positive manner. To transform the *upper-body stratum* to the *lower-body stratum*, one must demystify the sublime. In the case of the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, Berceo does this with the image of the Virgin Mary. He subverts a highly respected beatific figure by transforming her into a woman with popular speech, sentiments and actions. There are few examples of Mary speaking in a holy manner; she addresses herself to the devils with comical phrases, she behaves as a jealous lover, and she even assumes the role of a bullfighter. She has been transformed from an untouchable figure from another world, into a very average woman with human feelings and human words; this makes her more accessible to the audience. The transferring of roles in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* clearly demonstrates the importance of the *lower- and upper-body strata*. If

Mary has always been portrayed as a sensible and reasonable woman, why has she been portrayed in an untraditional manner, by a priest? This question will be answered more clearly later in this study.

Banquet Imagery

The medieval banquet was a large component of carnival imagery and created another form of release. Overly abundant feasting that led to a sinful life of lust and other excesses was discouraged formally by the Church: however, many times even the Church failed to prevent it. As Bakhtin remarks, the clergy also participated in these events, and thus the representation of the gluttonous monk was born. Banquets were places where people could express themselves freely because, once again, they were associated with carnival.

The power of food and drink to liberate human speech is proved by the fact that schoolmen's and clerics' talks were invaded by a wide range of "colloquial" parodies and travesties of sacred texts related to wines and foods. Such colloquial travesties were used at every feast. These texts, liturgical terms, and fragments of prayers turned inside out and debased accompanied every goblet of wine, every morsel of food. (Bakhtin, 296)

Berceo writes about a banquet in his *Milagro XXIII "El mercader fiado"*. This event is held to celebrate the miracles of the Virgin and Christ and as Bakhtin has mentioned in his text, banquets are places where speech is freed. The foreigner who chronicles the festivity is an archdeacon who was passing through Constantinople.

Siempre en essi día
que fabló la imagen,
fazien muy *alta festa*
con grandes alegrías

que cuntió esta cosa,
la su virtud preciosa,
con quirios e con prosa,
a Dios e a la Gloriosa.

Los pueblos de la villa,
fazién grand alegría
adobavan convivios,
sus carnes, sos pescados

páuperes e potentes,
todos con instrumentos;
davan *ad non habentes*
salpresos e recientes.

Andavan las redomas
conduchos adobados
quí prenderlo *quisiese*
non trayén en su pleito

con el vino piment,
maravillosament;
non avrié falliment,
ningún escarniment.

Un rico arcidiano,
caeció esta festa
vío grandes quirolas,
que nin udió nin vío

bien de tierras estrannas,
entre essas compannas;
processiones tamannas
otras d'éstas calannas.

Preguntó esta festa
ca era grand fazienda,
díssoli un *latino*
e sopiesse que ésta

como fo levantada,
noblement celebrada;
la raíz profundada
era verdat provada.

Plôgo'l al arcidiano,	tróvolo por grand cosa,
disso: "Laudetur Deus	e la Virgo gloriosa."
metiôlo en escripto	la mano cabosa,
déli Dios paraíso	e folganza sabrosa. (Amen.)

(Stanzas 697-702)²⁵

Everyone participates in the festivities and the celebrations are centred on the banquet table. Large quantities of different types of meat are shared among the townspeople and the foreigners that participated in

²⁵ Always on that day that this thing happened,
when the image spoke, due to its excellent virtue,
they hold a noble festival with hymns and poems,
with exultations to God and to the Glorious One.

The people of the town, paupers and wealthy,
all rejoiced with instruments;
they prepared banquets, they gave to those who had not
their own salted and fresh meat and fish.

The glasses of strong wine went round,
marvelously prepared dishes;
whoever wanted to partake need not do without:
they did not feel any scorn at this time.

A rich archdeacon, from very foreign lands
happened on this feast among that company:
he saw great dances, huge processions
the likes of which he had never heard nor seen.

He asked how the festival had started,
for it was a great event, nobly celebrated.
A Christian told him of its much discussed origin,
and he knew that this was a proven truth.

It pleased the archdeacon who considered it a great event:
he said, "May God and the Glorious Virgin be praised!"
He put it in writing with his fine script.
May God grant him paradise and delightful rest. (Amen).

(Stanzas 697- 702)

the event. Wine, another component of banquet imagery, also appears in the account. This is a perfect example of religious celebrations combined with popular traditions.

Learned Elements Employed in *Milagros*

Berceo was a very talented “author” because he was able to make the original “work” a more interesting “text” for his readers through the inclusion of popular details. The original Latin versions were written in prose form which contained few details and which only stated the facts. Berceo, using the skills he had acquired in his schooling, set this prose passage into structured verses which are pleasant to the ear. Latin versions exist for most of his texts, with the exception of the *Introducción* and *Milagro XXIV*. Since there is no extant source for these two texts, critics believe that they are Berceo “originals” (Wilkins, 140-141; Gerli, 1985: 7). If Berceo wrote the *Introducción*, was he familiar with the classical tradition of the *Locus Amoenus*²⁶? As a learned scholar, Berceo has undoubtedly come into contact with this *topos* before and he has used it to create the allegory of the valley.

Berceo paints the perfect setting of a lush valley populated by trees, flowers and streams. He caters to the five senses in his descriptions. The narrator, who is on a pilgrimage, is able to relax from

his journey surrounded by nature's bounty. It is a pseudo-paradise: the birds are singing, the four rivers flowing through the valley are hot in the winter and cool in the summer, there are many fruit trees and flower-covered fields. The tree that the narrator finds provides ample shade so that he can recover from his long journey. The narrator uses this setting to explain the real purpose of his text. By referring to himself as a pilgrim on a journey, he uses another *topos* that was very popular at that time. This well-known theme is an allegory of humanity's journey through life before reaching its destination, heaven. There are many hardships along the way to heaven, and so the paradise-like setting is a promise for the audience of better things to come.

Yo maestro Gonçalvo	de Verceo nomnado,
yendo en romería	caeçi en un prado,
verde e bien sençido,	de flores bien poblado,
logar cobdiçiaduero	para omne cansado.
Davan olor sovejo	las flores bien olientes,
refrescavan en omne	las [carnes] e las mientes;
manavan cada canto	fuentes claras corrientes,
en verano bien frias,	en invierno calientes.

²⁶ *Locus Amoenus* is the description of the perfect Utopia. A place where the vegetation is lush and the climate is perfect, it is neither hot nor cold. There is abundant scenery and plenty to eat and drink, a true paradise.

Aviën y grand abondo	de buenas arboleadas,
milgranos e figueras,	peros e mazanedas,
e muchas otras fructas	de diversas monedas,
mas non avië ningunas	podridas [nin] azedas.

La verdura del prado,	la olor de las flores,
las sombras de los árboles	de temprados sabores,
refrescáronme todo	e perdi los sudores:
podrië vevir el omne	con aquellos olores

(Stanzas 2-5)²⁷

By referring to the image of the valley, Berceo is able to attract the listener with the miracles of the Virgin Mary. Using an allegorical transposition of the *Locus Amoenus* theme, Berceo explains that the four

²⁷ I. Master Gonzalo de Berceo,
while on pilgrimage happened to pause in a meadow
green and untouched, full of flowers -
a desirable place for a weary man.

The flowers there emitted a marvelous fragrance;
they were refreshing to the spirit and to the body.
From each corner sprang clear, flowing fountains,
very cool in summer and warm in winter.

There was a profusion of fine trees -
pomegranate and fig, pear and apple,
and many other fruits of various kinds.
But none were spoiled or sour.

The greenness of the meadow, the fragrance of the flowers,
the shade of the trees of soothing aromas
refreshed me completely and I ceased to perspire.
Anyone could live with those fragrances.

(Stanzas 2-5)

rivers flowing through this valley are the four Evangelists; the birds which are nesting in the tree are saints that have been loyal to the Virgin Mary; the tree represents the miracles of the Virgin Mary.

If authors were not important during the Middle Ages, why did Berceo's name appear in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*? It is possible that Berceo chose to cite himself in the *Introducción* in order to make himself more accessible to his audience. This is also a *topos* in medieval literature, as we will see later in Marie de France's *Lais*. Since his name appears in the *Introducción*, Berceo gives more credibility to the Latin sources. He makes sure that he begins each narrative with the acknowledgement of a written source.

Era un ladrón malo	que más querié furtar
que ir a la elesia	nin a puentes alzar;
sabié de mal porcalzo	su casa gobernar,
uso malo que priso,	no lo podié dexar.

Si facié otros males,	esto no lo leemos,
serié mal condempnarlo	por lo que non savemos,
mas abóndenos esto	que deicho vos a vemos,
ai ál fizo, perdóneli	Christus en qui creemos.

(Stanzas 142-143)²⁸

²⁸ There was a bad thief who would rather steal
than go to church or build bridges;
he knew how to maintain his house by theft,
a bad habit that he took up and could not quit.

If he committed other sins we do not read about them;

The narrator's relationship with his audience is very important because he wants to turn as many people over to the saving grace of the Virgin.

The *Milagros* are mainly religious exempla on how to avoid an afterlife in Hell or in Purgatory. Berceo mentions in each narrative the possibility of salvation by having complete faith in the Virgin Mary. She is the only beatific figure who is able to save contrite humans and help them achieve greater glory in the afterlife. One of the common threads that all humans have is the inevitability of death. The mention of a chance to save the human soul from eternal damnation, in a place much greater than earth, Berceo brings hope to the poor, the devastated and the wealthy.

Berceo uses images to which his audience can relate and such is the case with *Milagro V "El pobre caritativo"*. Bread is a symbol of life, but in the Middle Ages it was also a factor of differentiation between social classes. The majority of the *Milagros'* audience would never be able to eat wheat bread, so the image of a destitute man receiving it from the Virgin as a gift, gave them hope for an improved life in the next world.

Yo so aquí venida por levarte conmigo,
al regno de mi Fijo que es bien tu amigo,
do se ceban los ángeles del buen candial trigo;
a las Sanctas Virtutes plazerlis há contigo.

(Stanza 137)²⁹

it would be wrong to condemn him for what we do not know;
let what we have said to you suffice:
if he did more, may Christ in Whom we believe pardon him!
(Stanzas 142-143)

- ²⁹ I have come here to take you with me
to the kingdom of my Son who is indeed your friend,

The message of eternal salvation in these short narratives offered a promise of riches in Heaven to all who served Mary with a pure heart.

Another way to guarantee an improved afterlife was to enter a holy life. Monasteries and convents were filled with candidates who entered their strict walls of discipline at a very early age. Parents “donated” their children to the service of God. In exchange the priests would pray for the souls of the parents. The parents were guaranteed personal salvation for themselves and for their child as they were enlisting their sons and daughters into a life of poverty, celibacy and obedience for the Glory of God. Their penance on earth would assure them riches in Heaven no matter what they did while they were alive. As this life could guarantee a positive outcome in the afterlife, they were more easily forgiven for their actions than the average person. This can be seen in previous examples of the behaviour by monks through parodies, disobedience of direct orders from Rome and violence – the latter being the case of the priests in Compostela.

Another reason for Berceo mentioning his name in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* is most likely his fear of the afterlife. Berceo dedicates his entire collection of *Milagros* to the Virgin Mary. Like Saint Ildefonsus

there where the angels feed on good wheat bread;
the Holy Virtues will be pleased with you.

(Stanza 137)

of Toledo, who wrote about the perpetual virginity of Mary, Berceo expects that She will save him because he has dedicated his text to Her glory.

Amigos e vassallos	de Dios omnipotent,
si vos me escuchássedes	por vuestro consiment,
querriavos contar	un buen aveniment:
terrédesho en cabo	por bueno verament.

Yo maestro Gonçalvo	de Verceo nomnado,
yendo en romería	caeçi en un prado,
verde e bien sençido,	de flores bien poblado,
logar cobdiçiaduero	para omne cansado.

(Stanzas 1-2)³⁰

The second mention of his name is in the concluding stanzas of his text.

La Madre gloriosa,	de los çielos Reína,
la que fue a Teófilo	tan prestable <i>madrina</i> ,
Ella nos sea guarda	en esta luz mezquina
que caer non podamos	en la mala rüina. (Amen)

³⁰ Friends and vassals of Almighty God,
if it pleases you to listen to me,
I would like to relate a fortunate experience.
Afterwards you will truly consider it wonderful.

I, Master Gonzalo de Berceo,
while on pilgrimage happened to pause in a meadow
green and untouched, full of flowers -
a desirable place for a weary man.

(Stanzas 1-2)

Madre del tu Gonzalvo seï remembrador
 que de los tos miraclos fue *enterpretador*,
 tú fes por él, Sennora, prezes al Criador,
 ca el tu privilegio vale a *peccador*,
 tú li gana la gracia de Dios, Nuestro Sennor. (Amen)

(Stanzas 910-911)³¹

Here Berceo clearly demonstrates his humility toward the Virgin as he prays for her help in the time of his death.

French Influences in the Text

One of the most obvious French influences in Berceo's *Milagros* happens to be the tradition of the *Mester de Clerecía*. This poetic tradition was more than likely studied and developed at the University of Palencia during the years that Berceo is believed to have studied there (Dutton, 83). The professors at this university, which was established by the French order of Cluny, had been educated in Paris and were responsible for teaching the most important disciplines: law, theology,

³¹ The Glorious Mother, Queen of Heaven,
 Who was for Theophilus such an excellent Godmother,
 may she be a help for us in the wretched world
 so that we cannot fall into evil ruin. (Amen).

Mother, be mindful of Your Gonzalo
 who was the versifier of all Your miracles.
 Pray for him, Lady, to the Creator,
 since Your privilege helps the sinner.
 Win for him the grace of God, Our Lord. (Amen).
 (Stanzas 910-911)

grammar, logic, and rhetoric. It is believed that Berceo and other students from this university had learned the necessary techniques to form the *Cuaderna Via*. If one studies the structure of the *Cuaderna Via* more closely, one can find similarities with the French Alexandrine verses. The *Cuaderna Via*'s meter is formed by monorhymic quatrains that contain verses of fourteen syllables. In each of the verses, two hemistiches of seven syllables each have a stress on the sixth syllable.

Amigos, si quisiéssedes	un pocco esperar,
aun otro miraclo	vos querria contar,
que por Sancta María	dennó Dios demostrar,
de cuya lege quiso	con su boca mamar. ³²

(Stanza 75)³³

These characteristics which appear in the *Cuaderna Via* can be found in French texts of that period, however there are some minor differences. According to Brian Dutton in his article "French Influences in the Spanish *Mester de Clerecía*".

[. . .] Spanish uses word stress to mark the sixth syllable of the hemistich, whereas French, which lacks word stress, had to use the phrase/clause stress peculiar to it (84).

Milagros de Nuestra Señora has many other obvious French influences aside from the verse structure, such as thematic similarities of courtly love which can be found on several occasions. Courtly love is not a

³²I have italicized the stressed sixth syllable for emphasis.

³³ Friends, if you would wait a short while,
there is yet another miracle that I would like to tell,
which God deigned to reveal through Holy Mary
whose milk he suckled with His own mouth.
(Stanza 75)

theme that would generally be found in a religious text. To have the authentic representation of the theme, there must be a love triangle: usually a lady, her husband and her lover. As the coined nineteenth century term suggests, this literary movement began in the courts of medieval Europe. Troubadours and trouvères later began writing about relationships within love triangles. The poems that were composed were based on feudal agreements between a lord and a vassal (Ibáñez-Rodríguez, 121-123). The vassal had to swear his loyalty to a lord in a ceremony; this guaranteed that the lord would grant him a fief. Loyalty is the most important virtue in the Middle Ages, but it was the cause of many separations between lovers. The troubadour creates an unreachable woman, she is beautiful, pleasant, and good. The factor that causes him to compose the poem is their separation. The agony of not being able to consummate their love either because of distance or because she does not accept him as a lover, produces *joie*, the ability to describe what he is feeling. How does this poetic theme fit into the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*?

There are three milagros that have courtly elements: Milagro I, "La casulla de San Ildefonso", Milagro IV, "El galardón de la Virgen" and Milagro XV "El novio y la Virgen". The troubadours wrote about beautiful, pure women. The Virgin Mary is by far the most pure image of a woman. She has been worshipped for Her loyalty to God, to Her Son, and finally to the sinners here on earth. She is the most obedient woman and has accepted all the trials in Her life with grace and submission. The idealisation of Mary was first introduced into the Visigothic liturgy by Saint Ildefonsus of Toledo. Jean Guitton, in his book *La Vierge Marie*, describes the reasons for the importance of this

maternal figure in religion. Mary is seen as the answer to the end of human suffering, which was imposed by Eve when she first sinned (94-95). Mary is the link between the Old Testament and the New Testament, through Her complete submission to the plans of God; She gave birth to the Saviour and by so doing, took part in the sinners' salvation. As the mother of Christ she is viewed as a co-redeemer. Her maternal instinct stretches out to all of humanity, as She is able to intercede on behalf of the human to God.

There are two differing views of the Virgin Mary in Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*: Mary as a mother and Mary as the Lady in the Courtly Love poems. The image of Mary as a mother is the most common one to occur in literature and in other works of art. The maternity of the Virgin usually focuses on two events in Her life: the birth of Jesus and His death. The birth of Jesus demonstrates Mary's role in the salvation of all humans; She is a humble participant in God's Will. At the Crucifixion of Christ, She remained at the cross where Her sentiments of pity and sorrow demonstrate her role as a mother. The maternal elements of the Virgin Mary appear on numerous occasions throughout Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. She is willing to aid Her "children" when they are in a desperate situation, in particular those who have served Her in the past. She not only saves Her servants from the devils, but She also takes time to demonstrate her maternal role as seen in Milagro XX, when she tucks a monk into bed.

La reina preciosa e de precioso fecho
 prisolo por la mano levólo pora'l lecho,
 cubriólo con la manta e con el sobrelecho,
 púso'l so la cabeza el cabezal derecho.

(Stanza 482)³⁴

Although Mary takes on the responsibility of becoming a mother to those humans, the characters themselves also recognize Her role as seen when they address Her as "Madre" (Stanza 389c).

Mary's role as the Lady in the Courtly Love poetry is quite obvious in the three milagros mentioned above. If we consider Berceo's role, we see that he is writing the *Milagros* for his lady, Mary. Even though She is a religious figure, Berceo is granting Her praise in the form of his text. He praises Her goodness, Her forgiveness and Her role as mediatrix and redemptrix³⁵. He addresses the Virgin in all the traditional Courtly Love terms: he calls Her "estrella de la mar" (Stanza 73a), "Gloriosa" (Stanza 25b), "reina" (Stanza 98b) and "poncella"(Stanza 117c) . He is elevating the Virgin to a pedestal and adoring Her as the Lady. He dedicates the collection of *Milagros* to Her and hopes that She will in turn grant him a favour - to help save his soul when it is time for his death. He pledges his loyalty and begs for Her guidance in the composition of the *Milagros*.

³⁴ The Beautiful Queen of excellent deed
 took him by the hand, brought him to his bed.
 She covered him with the blanket and the bedspread,
 She put the pillow comfortably under his head.
 (Stanza 482)

³⁵ Redemptrix is a term that refers to the co-operation of the Virgin in the redemption of the sinner (Pelikan,55). Mediatrix is a terms that refers to Mary's role in the salvation of the sinner as well, however, this time she is able to become an intercessor between Christ and the sinner (Pelikan 132)

Quiero en estos árboles un ratiello sobir
e de los sos miraclos algunos escribir;
la Gloriosa me guíe que lo pueda complir
ca yo non me trevria en ello a venir.

Terréo por miráculo que lo faz la Gloriosa
si guiarme quisiere a mí en esta cosa;
Madre, plena de gracia, reína poderosa,
tú me guía en ello, ca eres pñadosa

(Stanzas 45-46)³⁶

The praise of a lady in the courtly love poems is also seen in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. If Berceo has the role of the knight, and Mary is the Lady, then who is the lord, or the "husband"? The lord in this case would be Christ. He is the one who oversees the Virgin Mary. She is His mother, but since Christ is the ruler of the universe, She is His servant. In the courtly tradition, the husband was usually much older than his wife and was very jealous; this is where Christ differs from these men. He and His mother were born without sin and so Christ can tolerate the

³⁶ I want to climb up into those trees for a little while
and write about some of Her miracles.
May the Glorious One guide me so that I may complete the task
for I would not dare to undertake it otherwise.

I will take it as a miracle wrought by the Glorious One
if She should deign to guide me in this task:
Mother Full of Grace, Powerful Queen,
guide me in it, for You are merciful.

(Stanzas 45-46)

relationships of humans with His Lady, Mary. He hopes that through the friendship of the sinner with the Virgin, more people will be saved.

To observe more concrete images of the Virgin Mary as the Lady in the Courtly Love poems, we analyse the following Milagros: I, IV and XV. In Milagro I, "La casulla de San Ildefonso", the protagonist dedicates a work he has written to the Virgin. She rewards his loyalty with a special gift, a seamless chasuble that only he can wear.

Apareció'l la Madre	del Rey de Magestat,
con un libro en mano	de muy grand claridat:
el que él avié fecho	de la virginidat;
plogo'l a Illefonso	de toda voluntat.

Fízoli otra gracia	qual nunca fue oída:
dioli una casulla	sin aguja cosida;
obra era angélica,	non de omne texida,
fablóli pocos vierbos,	razón buena, complida.

[.]

Dichas estas palabras,	la Madre gloriosa
tollióseli de ojos,	non vío nulla cosa;
acabó su officio	la persona preciosa
de la Madre de Christo	criada e esposa.

(Stanzas 60-61 and 64)³⁷

³⁷ She extended to him another favor, never before heard:
She gave him a chasuble sewn without a needle;
it was an angelic work, not woven by human kind;
She spoke but few words to him, a good and perfect speech.

This situation has all of the elements of a love triangle: there is a "knight", Saint Ildefonsus, a "Lady", Mary, who rewards Her faithful servant, and Her husband or Lord, Christ. Berceo uses the word "esposa" in the last verse of his stanza 64. This means "wife" and is another term that refers to the Virgin Mary. It explains the similarity established between the courtly love triangle and Berceo's interpretation.

Milagro IV, "El galardón de la Virgen", presents a similar situation. A priest, who has been loyal to the Virgin Mary, dedicates five verses of praise to the Virgin. This milagro is similar to courtly poetry because the Virgin is described as a damsel and as a star. The cosmos is distant to humans, but the mother of Christ is within everyone's reach. She is the most accessible beatific figure to the sinner because of Her maternal instinct and her role as mediatrix. Courtly poets often wrote about a distance between themselves and their loved one. In a sense, this could also be applied to Berceo because the Virgin is far away from him and She inspires his poetry. Berceo also praises Christ, the Lord in his

"Friend," she said, "know that I am pleased with you.
You have sought for me not single but double honor:
you wrote a good book about me and have praised me well,
you have made me a new feast day, which was not the custom.

[.]

Having said these words, the Glorious Mother
vanished from sight; he saw nothing more of Her;
the precious Person had finished Her mission,
the Mother of Christ, His Servant and Spouse.
(Stanzas 60-61 and 64)

milagro. He uses cosmic elements to describe both of them and in doing so, demonstrates that they are at a level far above him.

Amava al so Fijo	e amava a ella,
Tenié por sol al Fijo,	la madre por estrella;
Querié bien al Fijuelo,	e bien a la ponzella,
Porquelos servié poco	estava con grant querella

(Stanza 117)³⁸

This particular character's reward for being faithful is resuscitation after his sudden death. Because death occurs shortly after the presentation of the sinner in the *Milagros*, all the characters must deal with the issue of salvation. Here Berceo is showing that if the audience adheres to the devotion to this character, they too will be saved by the grace of the Virgin Mary. The images of the Virgin as something unreachable. She is similar to the images given to women by the troubadours in courtly poems, yet She is capable of granting Her gift to Her faithful "lover".

In all of the milagros that contain courtly vocabulary and images, it is always the Virgin who rewards and speaks amicably to the characters.

Apareció'l la Madre	del Reï celestial
que en misericordia	nunqua ovo equal;
"Amigo -- disso'l – sálvete	el Sennor spirital,
de cuya Madre fust	tú amigo leal.

³⁸ He loved Her Son and he loved Her:
he considered the Son as the sun and the Mother as Star;
he loved dearly both the Child and the Maiden,
but since he served them little, he was very troubled.
(Stanza 117)

Afuérzate, non temas,	non seas desmarrido,
sepas serás aína	d'esti dolor guarido;
tente con Dios aína	por de cuita essido,
ca dizlo el tu pulso	que es bueno cumplido.

Yo cerca ti estando,	tú non ayas pavor,
tente por mejorado	de toda la dolor;
recebi de ti siempre	servicio e amor,
darte quiero el precio	de essa tu lavor."

(Milagro IV, Stanzas 124-126)³⁹

The Virgin speaks on very few occasions; when She does speak, it is in praise of a faithful servant, or to send away the evil spirits who are taking away Her vassal's soul. In the courts of the Middle Ages, ladies would reward their beloved's loyalty with a secret gift. Sometimes this was a veil, a kiss, or an intimate relationship. Berceo follows this

³⁹ The Mother of the Heavenly King appeared to him,
the One who in mercy is without peer;
"Friend," She said to him, "may the Spiritual Father save you,
who were His Mother's loyal friend.

Take heart, fear not, be not discouraged,
know that you will soon be relieved of this pain;
consider yourself at one with God, free from care,
your pulse now says that it has indeed ended.

With Me near you, you need not fear;
consider yourself cured of all the pain;
I always received from you service and love,
and now I wish to repay you for your labor."

(Stanzas 124-126)

tradition because the Virgin rewards her servant's loyalty with a quick ascent into Heaven.

Milagro XV "El novio y la Virgen" demonstrates a reversal of roles in the love triangle of courtly poetry. Here, the Virgin Mary is represented as the jealous "husband" of Her servant. She threatens him if he leaves Her service to get married. The man decides to follow his family's will and marry a woman who will secure their fortune and continue their line of descendants. This important topic will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. Before the wedding, the young man visits a church to pray and he hears the severe words and warnings of the Virgin. She possesses great jealousy, something that one would not expect to see in a beatific character, however, this clearly demonstrates her role as the medieval noble "husband".

Entró en la elesia	al cabero rencón,
inclinó los enojos	fazié su oración,
vinoli la Gloriosa,	plena de bendición,
como qui sannosamiente,	dissioli tal razón:

"Don fol malastrugado,	torpe e enloquido,
¿en qué roídos andas?	¿en qué eres caído?
Semejas ervolado,	que as yervas bevido,
o que eres del blago	de Sant Martín tannido.

Assaz eras varón	bien casado connmigo,
yo mucho te quería	como a buen amigo;
mas tú andas buscando	mejor de pan de trigo,
non valdrás más por esso	quanto vale un figo.

Si tú a mí quisieres	escuchar e creer,
de la vida primera	non te querrás toller:
a mí non dessarás	por con otra tener,
si non, avrás la lenna	a cuestras a traer.”

(Stanzas 339-342)⁴⁰

These words provide evidence of the Virgin's jealousy once the groom breaks his loyalty toward her in order to marry another. Even though the Virgin is supposed to be a sacred character, Berceo manages to bring Her down to a very popular level by using elements from courtly poetry. These techniques better illustrate his stories and help to gain some interest in his collection of milagros.

⁴⁰ He went into the church, to the most remote corner,
bent his knees, and said his prayer;
the Glorious One full of blessing came to him,
and angrily said these words to him:

“You ill-fated, stupid, crazy fool!
What predicament are you in? What have you fallen into?
You seem poisoned, as if you have drunk herbs
or have been touched with Saint Martin's Staff.

Young man, you were well married to Me;
I very much loved you as a good friend,
but you go around seeking better than wheat bread:
for that reason, you will not be worth more than a fig!

If you will listen to Me and believe,
you will not wish to cast aside the first life;
you will not leave Me in order to have another;
if you do, you will have to carry firewood on your back!”
(Stanzas 339-342)

As we have observed in this chapter, there have been many different influences in the Iberian Peninsula during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Most of these are from the French who travelled across the North in pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela. The different influences that we have studied more concretely are in the style and composition of the *Milagros*, in the inclusion of *popular* elements such as the *Carnival*, and *official* elements, such as the attitudes of the clergy and the state. It is unusual for a clergyman, like Berceo, to write new versions of original Latin prose pieces and to convert them into colourful and lively vignettes. Even though Berceo's versions of the *Milagros* are not as bare as the originals, he has chosen to structure them into rigid verses. To make them more appealing to his audience, he has chosen to write in the vernacular language of the Rioja region. All of the elements chosen by Berceo for his collection of miracles about the Virgin Mary, were meant to educate and entertain the pilgrims who were on their way to Santiago. However, for the modern reader, they provide insight into thirteenth century Spain.

Chapter 2

A Closer Look at Two Milagros: XIX and XXV

Milagros de Nuestra Señora has many interesting themes, as we saw in Chapter 1: anti-Semitism, the role of the Virgin Mary, two “opposing” cultures: *popular* and *official*, and French influences. These elements are important to the collection of milagros as they provide an exemplary glimpse into different medieval Spanish societies. The highlighted elements of the first chapter will be analyzed in a more comprehensive study of two milagros: Milagro XIX “El parto maravilloso” and Milagro XXV “De cómo Teófilo fizo carta con el diablo de su ánima et después fue convertido e salvo”. The first milagro illustrates a pilgrimage to Mont St. Michel, a shrine in France, and thus demonstrates the extension of foreign influences in the literature of medieval Spain by means of the *Camino de Santiago*. It is also important to note that Berceo’s collection of *Milagros* has few female characters; only two of the texts have feminine protagonists. This near-exclusion of women in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* demonstrates the negative opinion of the clergy in the thirteenth century toward the sex. The Virgin Mary appears in all of the milagros. However, She is seen as the means of salvation and not the source of sins; thus a separation between heavenly (good) and earthly (bad) women is formed. The last story in Michael Gerli’s edition of the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, “De cómo Teófilo fizo carta con el diablo de su ánima et después fue convertido e salvo” deals

with popular culture of the time, anti-Semitism, theological hierarchy, and foreign influences. Critics believe that this milagro made its way through medieval Europe from an Eastern tradition, and demonstrates the difference in religious liturgies. Even though it may derive from an Eastern source, the Theophilus legend has appeared in numerous manuscripts in France, Italy, Germany, and Spain. As there are many versions of the same text, there are some variations; most of these differences lie in the minor details of the original "work" and do not change the actual events of the narrative.

Milagro XIX "El parto maravilloso"

Milagro XIX, "El parto maravilloso", has appeared in numerous versions, other than the one composed by Gonzalo de Berceo. According to Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: the Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, this story appears all over medieval Europe (266). As this miracle took place in France, a manner for it to have reached the Iberian Peninsula is through the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Another likelihood can be attributed to the French clerics of Cluny, who had become established in the Northern area of the Iberian Peninsula in the 11th century. The setting for this text is Mont St. Michel, an island monastery in France, located between Normandy and Brittany. The protagonist, a pregnant woman, goes to visit the chapel of St. Michel where many miracles had taken place. During the day, the tide is low, making it possible for pilgrims to visit the monastery; once the tide goes

out, it is impossible to leave the island or to return to it. Our protagonist visits this holy place. On her way back, her legs become paralyzed and other pilgrims fear that they will drown in the waters if they return to help her. They abandon the woman and pray for her soul from the shore. Because the protagonist has asked the Blessed Virgin and Christ to help her, her salvation is guaranteed. The Virgin Mary prevents the woman's death and She delivers the child in the sea. The birth was painless and effortless. Once saved by the Virgin, the woman returns to shore with her newborn son and tells the others of the miracle that has occurred. She then predicts to the pilgrims that her story will be heard in many foreign lands. Taking into account the fact that Berceo has recorded this story in his collection, he has also taken a part in his character's prediction, thus establishing an element of credibility in his narratives.

"Oíd -disso la duenna-	la mi buena companna,
creo que non udiestes	nunqua mejor hazanna,
será bien retraída	<i>por</i> la tierra estranna,
en Grecia e en Africa	e en toda Espanna.

(Stanza 446)¹

¹ "Listen," said the woman, "my good company,
I believe that you never heard of a greater deed;
it will be reported throughout foreign lands-
in Greece and in Africa and in all of Spain.
(Stanza 446)

As we have seen in this milagro, there are two female characters: the pregnant woman (sinner) and the Virgin Mary. Both of these characters are described in maternal roles: the sinner because she is pregnant, and the Virgin Mary because She is the ultimate mother figure. As a mother, the Virgin worries about the salvation of all Her earthly children. The female protagonist is automatically labeled a sinner by the other characters and the narrator simply because she is pregnant. However, there is no indication in this milagro that her pregnancy was caused by a sinful act, something that a narrator usually includes in his characters' backgrounds. Warner indicates the common difference between women and Mary in the Middle Ages: "Accepting the Virgin as the ideal of purity implicitly demands rejecting the ordinary female condition as impure" (77). In "El parto maravilloso", we are simply made to believe that because the female character is pregnant, her sin must have been fornication. It is possible that this character is a married woman, and that the child is legitimate; however, these details are excluded in the text.

On account of her sin, the character must pay a penalty - death by drowning in the waters off Mont St. Michel. The other pilgrims, like the reader or audience, are forced into assuming that this woman is guilty of a terrible sin to receive such a punishment from God.

Los que eran essidos,	como non vedién nada,
cuidavan bien sin dubda	que era enfogada;
dizién: "Esta mesquina	fue desaventurada,

sos peccados toviéronli

una mala celada.”

(Stanza 440)²

This common belief expressed in Berceo's narrative demonstrates a superstition of the time: people receive bad luck or death for their sins or even , at times, for the sins of their parents. In the Middle Ages pregnancy was regarded not as a blessing but as a partial punishment from God for Eve's sin. The complete punishment for original sin involves pregnancy and pain in childbirth, as well as the decomposition of the body in death. Due to these beliefs, the pilgrims expected the woman from the story to die.

The pregnant woman in this text experiences something that according to theologians and the Scriptures is not possible: a painless and effortless birth. If the punishment for sin is pain in childbirth, why did the woman receive this miracle? According to medieval theologians, the only woman not to have experienced pain in childbirth is the Virgin Mary (Warner, 21-22). It was rendered impossible for any other woman to experience this privilege. It is obvious that the only explanation for this miracle was the woman's confession and pleas to the Virgin and to Christ. Because Mary is the stepping stone between the sinner and God, She is the only one able to help those here on earth. Not only did the Virgin help save this woman's life, She actively participated as the midwife for the child, thus demonstrating Her pity for the baby and Her loyal servant. Thanks to Her understanding, Mary has delivered two of her children - the newborn and the mother - from her sin.

² Those who got out, since they did not see anything, believed surely without a doubt that she had drowned; they said: "This poor woman was unfortunate; her sins laid a cruel ambush for her."

(Stanza 440)

Why did Mary have an easy delivery? Theologians concluded that because the Virgin was the only pure woman it was impossible for her to experience a true pregnancy like the rest of humanity. Mary was guaranteed a painless delivery because She had been born without the guilt of original sin in order to bear Christ, God's incarnation on earth. These events in the life of the Virgin were widely discussed by theologians and are now Articles of Faith (Warner, 22-23). As the chosen vessel for the incarnation of God, Mary's experience of childbirth has been compared to "passing water" because she was so holy (Warner, 44).

Associations of the Virgin Mary and Water

The Virgin saved the female character in this milagro in the water which is a symbol of renewal and life. Water is one of the four earthly elements (earth, water, fire and air) and therefore, according to Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), it is a strong component in the composition of man. Because humans are dependent on these four elements for their survival, Bakhtin has drawn several conclusions about the cycle of renewal. We have looked at the importance of the *grotesque* and the *lower-body stratum* in Chapter 1. The linking of material elements with sacred elements is somewhat controversial. Bakhtin gives an example in Rabelais, of people who are praying for water in a drought and receive from Heaven "salty" water instead.

Rabelais goes on to give a bold parody of a religious procession. During a ceremony organized by the Church, the faithful who were praying for rain suddenly saw drops of heavy sweat appearing on the ground as on the brow of human beings. They thought it was dew sent by heaven in

answer to their prayers. But they were mistaken, for when they tried to quench their thirst, they found the liquid was a pickled solution even saltier than sea water (330).

Rabelais plays with the gift granted to these servants of God. Instead of giving them the water they need, Pantagruel, a devil, taints God's blessing with sweat, something that is eliminated by the body. If we look at water, urine and sweat through Bakhtin and Rabelais' interpretation, we find that there is no difference. Water, one of the four elements essential to the survival of man, is consumed and then is excreted from the body as one of these by-products.

We must not forget that urine (as well as dung) is gay matter, which degrades and relieves at the same time, transforming fear into laughter. If dung is a link between body and earth (the laughter that unites them), urine is a link between the body and sea (335).

If sweat and urine are positive elements according to Bakhtin's studies of medieval and renaissance cultures, how can they be linked to a cleric's narrative in "El parto maravilloso"? How does salty matter renew?

In the case of Berceo, because he is a serious clergyman, he would not use urine as a substitute for water in his writings. Instead, Berceo uses the ocean as the setting for a "baptism" of sorts for the pregnant woman in his *Milagro XIX*. The character is purified and forgiven in the salty water around Mont St. Michel by the Virgin Mary; She protects Her servant from a certain drowning. The woman explains how when she entrusted herself to the Virgin and Christ, Mary came to her side and protected her from the waves with Her cloak. During the time that the Virgin was with her, she did not fear her situation.

Quando vi que de muert	estorcer non podía,
que de las fieras ondas	circundada sedía,
comendéme a Christo	e a Sancta María,
ca por mí consejo	otro non entendía

Yo en esto estando,	vino Sancta María
cubríome con la manga	de la su almexía;
non sentía nul periglo	más que quando dormía,
si yoguiesse en vanno	más leída non sería.

(Stanzas 447-448)³

Bakhtin considers salt to be a renewing substance. For that matter, Berceo must also consider it to be positive in the forgiveness and purification of his character because he has used the seawater as a setting for a "baptism". As this character was immersed in the waters off Mont St. Michel, she was cleansed of all of her sins. This is why the Virgin helped grant her a painless and effortless childbirth - once completely forgiven for her sin, she is now able to receive the Virgin's miracles. It is important to note, however, that the woman's newborn

³ When I saw that I could not wrest myself from death,
since I was surrounded by the fierce waves,
I commended myself to Christ and to Holy Mary.
for I knew of no other help for me.

While I was in this situation, Holy Mary came;
She covered me with the sleeve of Her cloak;
I felt no more danger than when I slept;
if I lay in a bath I would not be happier!
(Stanzas 447-448)

son was also born in the salty water of the sea and therefore he is also forgiven for his mother's sin and thus is allowed to live.

In her book *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, Marina Warner has some interesting observations about the Virgin Mary and Her link to ocean imagery. She states that the Virgin Mary replaced Diana, Antiquity's moon goddess. There are many examples in medieval literature of the Virgin being represented as the moon and Christ as the sun. The moon is often used as a symbol associated with nurturing. For this reason it is fitting that Mary, the Blessed Mother, is often depicted in paintings standing on a crescent moon. As an element of the sky, she is also therefore identified with another celestial element – the star.

Painters placed the glittering star on the Virgin's shoulder in altarpieces of the middle ages; and poets worked the theme, stressing sometimes the nautical imagery, as in John of Garland's thirteenth-century collection of Miracles of the Virgin called *Stella Maris*, in which Mary figures as the mariners' guiding light, and sometimes exulting purely in the beauty of the image, as in the lovely line that recurs in a student song composed in Paris around 1300 in honor of the Virgin's birthday: *Stella maris hodie processit ad ortum* (The star of the sea moves today to its rising)(263).

By contrasting the relationship with the moon goddess and the earth with that of the Virgin and the earth, we can find some interesting parallels. Diana, the lunar goddess, was worshipped because of the moon's relationship with tides. When Mary replaced Antiquity's goddess, She became identified with the sea. According to Warner, Mary's astral character gives Her control over tempests, not only as the guiding star to sailors but also as the star that can calm the waves and still the waters,

both figuratively and literally speaking. She is described by St. Anselm (1033-1109) as the solution for spiritual tempests.

If the winds of temptation arise, if you are diving upon the rocks of tribulation, look to the star, invoke Mary. If you are tossed upon the waves of pride, of ambition, or envy, or rivalry, look to the star, invoke Mary (Warner, 263).

The Virgin was a compass for sailors that were lost at sea. She replaced the North Star in navigation and in allegories such as the one provided by St. Anselm. She participated in the salvation of humanity and therefore it is logical for Her to rule on earthly territory. In the different narratives recorded in Berceo's collection there are many examples of the Virgin Mary referred to as "estrella de la mar"⁴. Warner describes the Virgin as a water goddess.

In this pattern of symbolism, Mary- like classical goddesses before her - emerged the eternal mistress of the waters, the protective deity of life, and especially the patroness of women in childbirth (262).

As the new lunar goddess, Mary demonstrates Her compassion for the pregnant woman by delivering her child and protecting her from the dangers of the ocean.

Is Pregnancy a Sin?

Why has Berceo portrayed pregnant women as sinners? The only two feminine characters in his collection, other than the Virgin, are a pregnant pilgrim and a pregnant Abbess. It is obvious that there is an identification of women as children of Eve. The narrator assumes that his female characters have sinned sexually because they bear the

⁴ My translation for this example is "guiding star of the ocean".

consequences for all to see. Even though some male characters have taken part in fornication, they do not show physical marks on their bodies. The women carry their "guilt" in the protuberance in their bellies. They are condemned for their sins by society and also by God. Society condemns them because they graphically display their sins. The second condemnation, by God, is that of a painful childbirth, which is one of the consequences of Eve's disobedience.

According to Joan M. Ferrante and Warner, women were valued for what their bodies could contribute to society. Women are associated with birth, motherhood, prostitution, and on some occasions, as in courtly poetry, inspiration. In many religious texts, women are portrayed as the Devil's helpers in leading the male soul astray: being descendants of Eve, the mother of humanity and the culprit of the "Fall of Man", there is no possible redemption from her role as temptress (Ferrante, 17). The only female figure that can liberate and "erase" the sins of Eve is the Virgin Mary and for this reason, Berceo, a clergyman, instructed in the contemporary way of thought, portrayed his female characters as guilty of bodily sin and thus they are marked by pregnancy.

Mikhail Bakhtin, who has analyzed the symbolic importance of pregnancy, sees it as a positive contributor to the life cycle. Instead of seeing birth and pregnancy as a result of sin, he considers them to be a renewing effect. Pregnancy, in his view, is an important component of the popular culture of the Middle Ages and also a valuable element of the *material lower-body stratum*. As with most elements associated with the *lower stratum*, pregnancy can also be a vital component of the *grotesque body*.

All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation. This is why the main events in the life of the grotesque body, the acts of the bodily drama, take place in this sphere. Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body - all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all these events the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven (Bakhtin, 317).

Pregnancy is the complete mark of excess and renewal. Renewal takes place in a woman's body because she creates life. The female body is a convergence of rebirth and superabundance. When a woman is pregnant, an exaggeration of the body is seen. This is the image of superabundance, a key factor in the *grotesque body*, according to Bakhtin. Excess in the body also exists in the case of banquets and the unending quantities of food that are consumed at these events (63). Bakhtin places great emphasis on the different biological functions of the human body: birth, sex, eating, defecation, and the renewing aspects that they bring. All of these functions take place in the *lower-body stratum* and they are regarded as "dirty" by the *official culture*. The *lower-stratum* is viewed negatively by the Church because it renders positive the very things that they consider to turn people away from God. It is tied into imagery of Hell because it is below the Earth. According to the Church, the human should try to live in a pure and incorruptible manner by following Christ's example. Reason and wisdom, the qualities of the mind, are located on the *upper-bodily stratum*, and therefore they are closely identified with Heaven: above the Earth. By considering these points, we are better able to understand the *popular culture* that existed in the Middle Ages. Because Berceo was a member of the *official culture*

he was not able to express himself in a more popular manner. However, studying this particular milagro through the eyes of Bakhtin helps us to understand the significance of pregnancy in Berceo's text. It also helps to juxtapose this positive point of view from the *popular culture* with the negative opinion of the Church.

Milagro XXV "De cómo Teófilo fizo carta con el diablo de su ánima et después fue convertido e salvo"

The next milagro that will be studied is the last one in Berceo's collection. As we have already seen there is some confusion about the placement of this text in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. Some editions place it last, and others place it second-to-last; however, all that we need to know about this milagro is that it has a different style from all the rest. The structure of this text comes from Eastern sources (Burkard, 27). The name of the protagonist in Milagro XXV is Greek: Theophilus, meaning "lover of God" (Warner, 323). This name is ironic because the character does not do as his name implies; he denies God and betrays Him in order to achieve two things that a cleric should never want- power and wealth.

The "Milagro de Teófilo", as it is most commonly called, has been controversial for the following reasons: greed for power and wealth by an important member of the clergy and rivalry among priests. It portrays a humble priest who decides he is not worthy to accept the post of Bishop. As a result, another priest is elected for this position and our hero is demoted. Because he is jealous of the new Bishop, Theophilus seeks the help of a Jewish character who is skilled in dealings with the "underworld". After he has accepted this man's help, he finds himself

renouncing his Christian faith to Satan in an obscure ceremony after which he officially signs a pact with him. Later, Theophilus begins to feel guilt for renouncing God and the Virgin Mary. He begs Mary to forgive him and to help recover his soul as well as the contract that he signed. The Virgin accepts his apologies, agrees to seek God's forgiveness on his behalf and descends into Hell to retrieve the signed contract. Theophilus confesses his sins to the Bishop and later to the citizens of the town; in front of all these witnesses, he burns the contract. Theophilus dies a few days later, absolved from all of his sins.

Differences Between Eastern and Western Sources

This milagro provides a glimpse into the different types of Christianity. Richard Burkard, who has studied this particular milagro and he states that it originates in Eastern Europe. He believes that the original version, a Byzantine work, of this miracle-story was written sometime in the early Middle Ages, around the seventh century (27). This early version of the text underwent several changes even before Gonzalo de Berceo wrote about it. According to Burkard, the Theophilus legend was translated from Greek into Latin in the second half of the ninth century by a certain "Paul the Deacon, a Neapolitan, as he calls himself" (27). From this Latin version came all of the different manuscripts of this text, including the one used by Gonzalo de Berceo. Because the original work derived from an Eastern form of Christianity, there are some differences present in the development of the miracle-story. If we observe the structure of the "Latin" texts, the salvation of the sinner follows this pattern:

- 1) The introduction to the life of the sinner

- 2) The fall of the sinner into a specific sin
- 3) The death or near-death of the sinner
- 4) The intervention of saints or the Virgin on behalf of the sinner
- 5) The sinner is saved
- 6) Penance by the sinner before he or she dies in peace.

The “Milagro de Teófilo” follows a different pattern in the salvation of the title character. The following demonstrates the steps to salvation in Eastern Christianity:

- 1) The introduction to the life of the sinner
- 2) The fall of the sinner into a specific sin
- 3) The realization by the sinner of the sin committed
- 4) The lamentation of the sin and penance by the sinner
- 5) The intervention of the Virgin on behalf of the sinner
- 6) The forgiveness of the sinner
- 7) A public confession of the sin
- 8) A peaceful death for the sinner.

Burkard makes some significant contributions in his article that help us to understand salvation in Eastern and Roman Christianity. The Western Church believes that Christ came into the world to save the sinner. Humans have an innate weakness that can be traced to the original sin by Adam and Eve in the Garden. It is only through Christ and His death that the sinner can ask for his or her forgiveness. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, there is not as much emphasis placed on the salvation of the sinner through the death of Christ. The sinner must first come to a

realization of his or her sins before going through a series of steps in order to achieve forgiveness.

The breakdown of these specific steps follows the events chronicled in Berceo's *Milagro XXV*⁵. The sinner comes to a realization of his sin (*Metanoia*) by means of God's heavenly intervention. God stirs the heart of the sinner and helps him to understand his sin.

El Sennor que non quiere	muerte de peccadores
mas que salven las almas,	emienden los errores,
tornó en est enfermo	de mortales dolores,
que era decebido	de malos traïdores.

(Stanza 793)⁶

The individual must then come to a painful awareness of his sin (*Kataruksis*).

Los vines que fiziera	ennos tiempos trocidos,
el buen Sennor non quiso	que li fuessen perdidos;
reviscló los sus sesos	que yazién amortidos,
abrió luego los ojos	que tenié adormidos.

Respiró un poquiello,	tornó en so sentido,
comidió su fazienda,	viose mal tannido;
comidió más adentro	qué avié prometido,

⁵ Each step has been given a name by the Greek Orthodox Church, which I am including in parenthesis. More detailed descriptions can also be found in Burkard's article "Two Types of Salvation in Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*".

⁶ The Lord, Who does not want the death of sinners
but, rather, that souls be saved and errors amended,
made this one sick with mortal pains,
he who was deceived by evil traitors.

(Stanza 793)

allí cadió Teófilo

en tierra amortido.

(Stanzas 794-795)⁷

Once the individual accepts his sin, he must go through a period of sincere sorrow (*Penthos*). This period is usually characterized by the shedding of tears, a symbol of purification.

Quarenta días sobo

en esta contención,

sufrié dias e noches

fiera tribulación;

de ál no li membrava

si d'esto sólo non:

clamar a la Gloriosa

de firme corazón.

(Stanza 821)⁸

⁷ The good he has done in past times,
the good Lord did not want lost to him.
He resuscitated his mind that lay as dead,
then he opened his eyes, which were asleep.

He breathed a little, he regained consciousness,
he considered his case, he saw himself badly manipulated;
he thought deeper about what he had promised.
There Theophilus fell prostrate to the ground.
(Stanzas 794-795)

⁸ Forty days he continued this plea,
he suffered great tribulation day and night.
Only of this was he mindful, not of any other thing:
to call on the Glorious One with a true heart.
(Stanza 821)

Si ante fue Teófilo	de grand decoción,
mucho fue después <i>ende</i>	de mayor compunción;
tres días e tres noches	sovo en oración,
nin comió nin bebió	nin exió de lección.

Semejavan sus ojos	dos fuentes perennales,
ferié con su cabeça	en los duros cantales;
sus punnos en sus pechos	davan colpes <i>capdales</i> ,
dizié: “¡Válasme, Madre,	como a otros vales!

(Stanzas 852-853)⁹

After all of these steps are achieved, only then will the Virgin intervene on behalf of the sinner. Since Mary is the mother of Christ, He cannot refuse Her anything, and so the sinner is always saved. In Eastern Christianity, the sinner must then confess his sin to a member of the clergy after which, depending on the severity of the sin, he must confess it to the citizens of the town (Burkard, 29-30). All of the above-noted steps from Eastern Christianity are present in the “Milagro de Teófilo”. These Eastern influences create a theological and structural difference between Milagro XXV and the other texts in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*.

⁹ If Theophilus was very devoted before,
after this he was even more remorseful.
Three days and three nights he was in prayer;
he neither ate, nor drank, nor left off reading.

His eyes resembled two perennial fountains,
he hit his head against the hard stones;
his fists gave his chest great blows.
He said, “Help me Mother, as You help others!”
(Stanzas 852-853)

Anti-Semitism in the "Milagro de Teófilo"

Whereas the main theme in Milagro XIX related to water, Milagro XXV has anti-Semitism as its base. Berceo describes all his Jewish characters negatively by associating them with obscure practices and by using them as the Devil's recruiters of Christian souls. In this final milagro, there is no exception. This marginalized character lures Theophilus into giving up his soul for power and fame.

Do morava Teófilo,	en essa bispalía,
avié y un judío	en essa judería;
sabié él cosa mala,	toda alevosía, ¹⁰
ca con la uestantigua	avié su cofradía.
Era el trufân falsso	pleno de malos vicios,
savié encantamientos	e muchos maleficios;
fazié el malo cercos	e otros artificios,
Belzebud lo guñava	en todos sus oficios.
En dar consejos malos	era muy sabidor,
matava muchas almas	el falsso traïdor;
como era basallo	e muy mal sennor
si él mal lo mandava	él faziélo peor.

(Stanzas 766-768)¹¹

¹⁰Italics have been placed on words and phrases that have anti-Semitic references.

¹¹ In that bishopric where Theophilus lived
there was a Jew in the Jewish quarter.
He knew evil things, every treachery,
for he had his brotherhood with the Devil.

Teófilo mesquino, de Dios desamparado,
venciólo so locura e muda del Peccado;
fo demandar consejo al trufán diablado,
cómo podrié tornar al antigo estado.

(Stanza 772)¹²

Berceo's intense dislike of this Jewish character is made very apparent by the negative descriptions and adjectives that he uses. He mentions that his character was even more evil than the Devil (Stanza 768c,d); to be compared to the Devil was not good, but to surpass the Devil was even worse.

To supplement his dislike of Jewish people, Berceo mixed his anti-Semitic views with his knowledge of witchcraft and other superstitions. The "Milagro de Teófilo" is the miracle-story with the most information regarding black magic. Berceo has purposely linked this aspect of popular culture with his Jewish characters because they belonged to another faith. Since Berceo had to preach the glories of his own religion, he had to frighten his audience with false information about other

*The false trickster was full of evil vices,
he knew enchantments and many machinations.
The evil one drew circles and did other artifices;
Beelzebub guided him in all his work.*

*He was very knowledgeable in giving bad advice.
The false traitor carried off many souls;
as he was the vassal of a very evil lord;
if ordered to do evil, he did even worse.*

(Stanzas 766-768)

¹² Wretched Theophilus, forsaken by God,
was conquered by his madness and the promptings of the Devil.
He went to ask for advice from the *bedeviled trickster*.
how he could return to his previous status.
(Stanza 772)

religions. The Jewish faith was very private and because of this, there was an aura of uncertainty around it. Berceo and his contemporaries took advantage of this and used it as an explanation for black magic and other superstitions. Occult references are made about the Jewish character in this story: he foresees the future for the town members (Stanza 771), he tells Teófilo that he has to meet with his "lord" at midnight at the crossroads (Stanza 778), and that his lord will grant Theophilus his wish (Stanza 773).

In the Middle Ages, time was seen as being a gift from God that had to be respected. Time was not to be used for negative purposes such as usury. Midnight was believed to be the hour when spirits of evil made their outings. It was also at this time that witches would gather and hold their ceremonies. Berceo chose midnight for the meeting between Theophilus and the Devil, knowing that his audience would be aware of these connotations and superstitions. This hour, coupled with the meeting at a crossroad, has even more symbolism. Crossroads are where hangings took place in the Middle Ages. This superstitious location is also a symbol of the different choices that humans make in order to reach Heaven, as we saw in Chapter 1. It was also believed that crossroads separated the physical world from the spirit world. It is at this precise location that the Jewish character asks Theophilus to wait for his "lord".

Luego la otra nochí,	la gente aquedada,
furtóse de sus omnes,	issió de su posada;
fo tastar a la puerta,	ca sabié la entrada,
el trufán sovo presto,	abrióli sin soldada.

Prisolo por la mano,	la nochi bien mediada,
sacólo de la villa	a una cruzejada;
disso'l: "Non te sanctigues	nin te temas de nada,
ca toda tu fazienda	será cras mejorada."
(Stanzas 777-778) ¹³	

In this excerpt from *Milagro XXV*, we see that the Jewish character asks Theophilus not to cross himself; this action is meant to protect a Christian from evil. The Jewish man is perceived as being a sinner as he leads Theophilus further away from God. Theophilus no longer has God's protection and from that moment on he becomes prey to the occult.

Dangers Encountered By Theophilus on the Road

Another superstition that is found in the "*Milagro de Teófilo*" revolves around the dangers of traveling in the Middle Ages. Bronislaw Geremek mentions in "*The Marginal Man*", a text in *Medieval Callings*, the dangers of travelling during the Middle Ages. Very few people traveled by themselves because they feared robbery, death or a meeting

¹³ Then, the next evening, with everyone asleep,
he stole away from his men; he went out of his house.
He went to knock at the door, for he knew the entrance.
The trickster was ready; he opened it without delay.

He took him by the hand; in the middle of the night,
and led him out of town to crossroads.
He told him, "Do not cross yourself or fear anything,
for your whole affair will be improved tomorrow."
(Stanzas 777-778)

with evil spirits. People were wary of leaving their hometowns and if they had to travel, it was usually done in the company of others.

Although the traveler would seem to be the perfect realization of the Christian ideal of the *viator* in this earthly life, an element of alienation, or at least the risk of alienation, was inherent in the concept of the voyage. Travelers who abandoned their own natural milieu and exposed themselves to the perils of the road were sure to have relations with unknown persons and to encounter the insidious perils of nature (348).

Images of evil spirits appear once Theophilus leaves his town and passes the crossroads. The most sinister examples of the occult appear at his meeting with the Devil.

Vío a poca de ora	venir muy grandes yentes
con ciriales en manos	e con cirios ardientes,
con su rei en medio,	feos, ca non luzientes:
¡Ya querrié don Teófilo	seer con sus parientes!

Prísolo por la mano	el trufán traïdor,
levólo a la tienda	do sedié el sennor;
recibiólo el rei	asaz a grand onor,
sí fizieron los príncipes	que'l sedién derredor.

(Stanzas 779-780)¹⁴

¹⁴ Soon he saw many great people come
with candelabra and burning candles in hand,
ugly and not shining, with their king in the midst.
Now Sir Theophilus wished he were with his kin!

The treacherous trickster took him by the hand;
he brought him to the tent where the master was.
The king received him with sufficient great honor,
as did the princes who were around him.

(Stanzas 779-780)

The images portrayed here by Berceo of the Devil's entourage are familiar even to the modern reader. The element of fire is present by means of the lit candles, as well as a procession of ugly and not shining followers. In comparison to other supernatural figures, such as angels, there is a difference in the general description of these evil figures. The angels and other beatific figures are portrayed with great beauty and are usually glowing or shining. Here, the devils are depicted as being the opposite.

There are two different kinds of devils in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*: the comical ones and the sinister ones. As seen in Chapter 1, Berceo describes his demonic characters using comical images. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, devils have been represented in this manner throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; they were not perceived negatively as is now the case. People dressed as devils in carnival festivities and were entertainment for the townspeople.

The announcement of the performance mentioned that the male and the female devils would run loose in the streets of the city and of the nearby villages several days before the opening. The actors, disguised as devils, felt that they were somehow out of bondage and communicated this feeling to those who came into contact with them. They created an atmosphere of unbridled carnivalesque freedom. They considered themselves exempt from the law and, being mostly recruited among poor people (hence the expression "poor devil"), they often took advantage of their role to rob the peasants and mend their financial affairs. (Bakhtin, 266).

The "Milagro de Teófilo" demonstrates a different kind of devil. Berceo's representation of these creatures is not the same comical figures we have encountered in other milagros, but rather, as the sinister characters of

modern day that inspire fear instead of laughter. Where did this change come from? Because this particular milagro did not come from a Latin source, it is possible that there were negative connotations present in the Eastern traditions regarding the representations of devils in texts. The devils in this milagro are ugly and are not shiny. They carry lit candles and candelabras in a sinister procession but they are not given a voice; the only devil to receive this privilege is Satan. What the king of the devils says to Theophilus and the Jewish character is not comical either. He employs a feudal discourse to demonstrate the seriousness of their agreement. He mentions a signed contract and he also refers to loyalty, lords, and servitude.

Díssoli el diablo:	"Non serié buen derecho
a basallo ageno	yo buscar tal provecho;
mas deniegue a Christo	que nos faz muy despecho,
facerli é que torne	en todo so bienfecho.
Deniegue al so Christo	e a Sancta Maria,
fágame carta firme	a mi placenteria;
ponga ý su seyello	a la postremeria.
tornará en su grado	con muy grand mejoría."

(Stanzas 784-785)¹⁵

¹⁵ The Devil said to him, "It would not be very just
that I seek such profit for another's vassal;
but let him deny Christ who makes us very hated,
and I will make his fortune return completely.

Let him deny his Christ and Holy Mary,
write me a valid contract to my liking,
put his seal there at the end.

According to some of the *Milagros'* critics, this particular story was the first one in medieval Spain to deal with the theme of pacts with the Devil. Berceo chooses not to portray his devils as comical figures for this reason, instead making them appear as threats to human salvation. There are, of course, other sinister elements in his text that make the devils appear more threatening than comical, such as the setting: the meeting at the crossroads at midnight, a time and place already linked with popular superstitions of the occult.

Theophilus' Pact with the Devil

The final superstitious element present in the "Milagro de Teófilo" deals with the contract that Theophilus signs with the Devil. The popular belief in the Middle Ages was that individuals who signed this pact with the Devil would suffer the loss of his or her shadow and colour. This belief is still present in horror films and books of our day. The most famous example from a modern text is in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, where the vampire has no shadow or reflection. Berceo also uses this characteristic to describe his cleric in the milagro.

Pero perdió la sombra,	siempre fo desombrado,
perdió la color buena,	fincó descolorado;
pero Dios se lo quiso,	non por poder del Peccado,

and he will return to his rank with great improvement."
(Stanzas 784-785)

tornó el malastrugo

en todo su estado.

(Stanza 788)¹⁶

The loss of colour indicated that the Devil had started to take away this man's life. Theophilus was already dead in the eyes of the Church. It is a symbolic demonstration, by means of the physical body's description, of this character's spiritual death. The description quoted above is in sharp contrast to another given of the hero later in the narrative after he confesses his sins to the town and receives communion.

Adiesso que Teófilo,
reçibió Corpus Domini
fue a ojo del pueblo
un resplendor tan fiero

un cuerpo martiriado,
e fue bien confessado,
de claridat cercado,
que non serié asmado.

Fue el pueblo certero
e era *de* grand mérito
e Dios que lo cubrié
e prendió el diablo

que era omne santo,
por qui fazié Dios tanto,
de tan precioso manto
en ello grand quebranto.

Reluzié la su cara,
com la de Moisés
o como San Andrés

tales rayos echava,
quando la ley portava,
quando en la cruz estava;

¹⁶ But he lost his shadow, he was always without it.
He lost his good color, he remained pale.
Not due to the power of the Devil but as God willed,
the unfortunate one returned to his former post.
(Stanza 788)

el Criador en esto pocca onrra no'l dava.

Quanto esto veyeron los pueblos e las yentes
que ixién de su cara tales rayos luzientes,
cantaron otras laudes, otros cantos rezientes,
en laudar la Gloriosa todos eran ardientes.

(Stanzas 895-898)¹⁷

Not only did Theophilus regain his spiritual life, but he also surpasses the human glow that he had at the beginning of the milagro. Berceo's description indicates the differences between the beatific figures and the devils. The holy characters shine whereas the devils do not. Since Theophilus is now with the Grace of the Virgin and God, he is able to display this beatific trait.

¹⁷ Immediately afterward, Theophilus, a martyred body, received Corpus Domini and was fully confessed. He was surrounded by brightness in sight of the people, by a splendor so great it could not be imagined.

People were certain that he was a holy man,
and that he, for whom God did so much, was of great merit,
and God covered him with such a beautiful cloak,
from which the Devil took great offense.

His face was shining, emitting rays of light,
like Moses when he carried the Law,
or like Saint Andrew when he was on the cross;
with this the Creator was giving him no small honor.

When the town and the people saw this,
such shining rays issuing from his face,
they sang other lauds and other prayerful songs.
All were ardent in praising the Glorious One.
(Stanzas 895-898)

Feudal and Legal Discourses in Milagro XXV

As we saw in the previous chapter, there are signs of courtly elements present in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*; the courtly factor in this milagro is feudal discourse. Berceo has applied this element in his description of the meeting between Theophilus and the Devil. The meeting has all of the elements required in the ceremonies of dubbing. According to Carl Stephenson and Franco Cardini, for a dubbing ceremony to take place, there needs to be a lord and a faithful knight. There is a moment in the ceremony when the knight must pledge his loyalty to the lord, and this part of the ceremony is usually closed with a written or spoken contract. This contract is what bonds the two men together and also what symbolizes their loyalty to each other. Usually after the ceremony the knight receives a fief from his lord. He is allowed to rule this land for the duration of his life and once he dies, it must be “renewed” in another ceremony by his son. In the “Milagro de Teófilo” we find that a sinister “dubbing” takes place between the Devil (lord) and the hero (vassal). The symbolic “fief” is the return of Theophilus to his former glory. In order to prove his loyalty to Satan, Theophilus must renounce his previous lord, God. Once the swearing takes place, he needs to sign a contract to make the ceremony official.

Dísoli el diablo:

a basallo ageno

mas deniegue a Christo

“Non serié buen derecho

yo buscar tal provecho;

que nos faz muy despecho,

facerli é que torne en todo so bienfecho.

Deniegue al so Christo e a Sancta María
fagame carta firme a mi placentería ;
ponga y su seyello a la postremería,
tornará en su grado con muy grand mejoría."

Teófilo con gana de en precio sobir,
al placer del diablo ovo a consintir;
fizo con él su carta e fizola guarnir
de su seyello misme que no'l podié mentir.

(Stanzas 784-786)¹⁸

The feudal discourse also appears with the use of words such as "Sennor, rey coronado" (782a), "basallo de muy mal sennor" (768c), "él fágate servicio a todo so poder,/ avrás en él basallo bueno a mi creer" (783c,d). Berceo's use of feudal discourse is an obvious sign that the clergy was not completely isolated from the rest of society in the Middle

¹⁸ The Devil said to him, "It would not be very just
that I seek such profit for another's vassal;
but let him deny Christ who makes us very hated,
and I will make his fortune return completely.

Let him deny his Christ and Holy Mary,
write me a valid contract to my liking,
put his seal there at the end,
and he will return to his rank with great improvement."

Theophilus wishing to rise in importance,
had to consent to the pleasure of the Devil.
He wrote his contract and had it notarized
with his own seal, which he could not belie.
(Stanzas 784-786)

Ages, as Bakhtin would like us to think. Berceo is familiar with many terms that were used by the worldly hierarchy, especially in the loyalty agreements between vassals and lords, because of his contact with the “outside” world. Unlike the other priests and clerics in San Millán, Berceo was a secular priest and he had certain freedoms that his “brothers” didn’t have. Because there are feudal descriptions in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, the modern reader can have a better understanding of the society in which this author lived.

As a notary for Abbot Juan Sánchez, Berceo is familiar with legal discourse. He used his knowledge of this profession in Milagro XXV to emphasize the importance of the Virgin Mary’s role as mediatrix. The Virgin intercedes for Theophilus in this text and She uses legal terminology and actions to achieve Her mission. She plays the role of lawyer and judge on more than one occasion in this milagro. As a judge, She listens to Theophilus’ lament before She agrees to help him. He justifies his need for Her intervention with examples of Biblical characters who have sinned against God and who were delivered from His wrath (Stanzas 826 - 831). After the Virgin Mary is convinced of his lament and apology, She rules that he will be forgiven for the crime of renouncing his faithfulness to Her (Stanzas 832-834).

Having forgiven Theophilus, She takes on the role of a lawyer when She agrees to defend his case to God (Stanzas 833-834). The crime of renouncing Christ is more serious than his first offence because God is

the ultimate ruler and judge. As the Virgin was essential to God's plan for human salvation, She has an advantage over all the other beatific figures that mediate on behalf of the sinner. Her Son cannot deny Her anything. Theophilus' acquittal from his greatest crime is guaranteed because She would defend his case.

Once God and the Virgin have forgiven Theophilus, She again becomes the judge, as She must sentence him. Nobody in the collection of milagros is completely free from sin; they must pay a price before they can die in peace and go to Heaven. Such is the case with Theophilus. He is sentenced to a public confession of his sins ordered to renounce Satan as lord, and then to reaffirm his faith in Christ and the Virgin Mary (Stanza 834). To complete his forgiveness, the Virgin retrieves the signed contract with the Devil and it is burned at his confession (893).

The two milagros that we have studied closely in this chapter have helped us look at the different elements that were mentioned in Chapter 1: anti-Semitism, the role of the Virgin Mary, foreign influences, and Bakhtin's differentiation between popular and official cultures. Although Berceo was a member of the clergy, he integrated superstitions and other popular beliefs into his narratives to entertain his audience. The Latin sources that Berceo used for his *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* were not very detailed, and the modifications and embellishments that he made aided in making the texts more interesting to the pilgrims thus attracting them to his monastery. In the following chapters we will look

at Marie de France's text, the *Lais*. We will examine her influences to see if there are any similarities between the *Lais* and Gonzalo de Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*.

Chapter 3

An Analysis of Key Themes in Marie de France's *Lais*

The text that will be discussed in this chapter was composed in twelfth century France, although manuscripts of the same material appear in subsequent centuries. Marie de France remains basically unknown; although she is credited as the author of three important texts in medieval French literature: the *Lais*¹, the *Fables* and the *Purgatoire de Saint Patrick*. As far as this study is concerned, only the *Lais* will be discussed. Like Berceo, Marie de France composed her narratives using vernacular language. Even though the texts employ a local dialect – which varies from manuscript to manuscript – it is clear by the nature of the references and literary style that Marie de France received a superior education. With these factors in mind, it is assumed that she was either a member of the Church or of the Court (Brzezinski Potkay, 80). The narratives that Marie treats in her collections are from different sources. The *Lais* derive from Breton and Norman oral texts and not from classical tradition. As we have already seen in the first two chapters of this study,

¹The definition of *lai* according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* is the following:

A term from Old French meaning a short lyric or narrative poem. The *Contes* (c. 1175) of Marie de France were narrative *lais* of Arthurian legend and other subjects from Breton folklore, written in octosyllabic couplets (119).

texts of Greek and Roman Antiquity were interpreted or *glossed*² by medieval writers. It was believed that the new *glosses* of original works would enhance and provide insight that was otherwise lacking from the classical texts. Because Latin was the language of the learned classes, most writers of this age choose to use it when writing their renditions. Marie has opted to write in a language other than Latin and to treat a subject that did not originate in classical works. She felt that the folkloric texts of her region merited the same prestige as those from Antiquity (*Prologue*, lines 33-42). Marie de France incorporates many popular elements into her stories: the *malmariée*³, superstitions, supernatural creatures, and magic potions. Even though there are many popular factors present in her work, she structures her texts following the rigid style of composition that is commonly found in the works of her contemporaries. The *Lais* are a convergence of learned and folk cultures in the Middle Ages. Marie de France is also able to reveal feminine opinions in her texts by giving point of views that otherwise would have

²Marie de France uses this term to describe the interpretations made by her contemporaries from classical works. The following quotation, from the *Prologue*, demonstrates her use of gloss in the Anglo-Norman version of the *Lais*:

e ki aprendre les deveint,
que puissent gloser la letre
e de lur sen le surplus metre.
(*Prologue*, vv. 14-16)

³ The term *malmariée* refers to the unhappily married woman in texts of courtly romance. The woman was usually married to someone much older than she was; this large age difference created jealousy on the husband's behalf resulting in his forcing her to live in a closed room, away from the rest of society.

been ignored if it had not been for her skill in rhetoric and more than likely her position in society. The *Lais* guide the modern reader to a full understanding of the privileged levels in medieval society. This is done by means of Marie's combination of *popular* and *official* cultures.

Because the sources that Marie relied upon for her *Lais* were from oral texts, there was a great possibility that they would either be forgotten or distorted by the numerous retellings they underwent. Oral texts stemmed from local folklore and there were probably many different versions of the stories. Marie mentions in practically all of her narratives that she has witnessed an earlier telling or account before she chose to treat the subject herself. Therefore, one can safely assume that the rest of her audience would have also heard these stories at some point in their lives. The author of the *Lais* states that each story comes from an oral Breton or Norman tradition, but on one occasion she mentions the use of a written source (*Le Chèvrefeuille*, lines 5-7). Like the oral narrators of these folkloric tales, Marie has the opportunity to embellish and edit each one of her texts. She has taken the oral texts one step further than have her local mentors by choosing to transmit these narratives in octosyllabic couplets.

The folkloric versions of the *Lais* were not necessarily told in the same order as the one Marie has chosen for her compilation. Looking at the different manuscripts of the *Lais*, of which five are known, it can be observed that there are some variations in the content of each one (Birge-

Vitz, 309). The most complete version and thus the version that is most widely used, dates from the second half of the thirteenth century and is commonly referred to as Harley 978. This version is housed in the *British Library* in London (Harf-Lancner, 10)⁴. In the remaining four manuscripts, some narratives do not appear in each version. Only Harley 978 contains the twelve narratives and most importantly, the *Prologue*. It can therefore be assumed that the *Lais* were not performed all at once, and were told a few at a time. Marie de France has chosen these twelve narratives and compiled them as an offering to the king addressed in the *Prologue* (lines 43-50). She therefore must have chosen the tales that she believed would be pleasing to her courtly patron.

To fully appreciate Marie de France's texts, we must contextualize them within the socio-political climate of the time. Medieval France can be studied by geographic divisions: North of the Loire and South of the Loire. The *Lais* are a joining of two popular cultures: from the South, there are influences of courtly poetry; from the North, local superstitions and supernatural characters. The region South of the Loire, better known as l'*Occitanie*, greatly influenced Northern literature. It inspired countless Northern composers and writers by means of the integration of troubadours in the royal courts. Eleanor of Aquitaine (1124-1204) is

⁴Harf-Lancner provides this information from her *Introduction* to Marie de France's *Lais*. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990. The remaining four manuscripts are different from Harley 978. Each manuscript contains a divers selection of narratives and none of them has the *Prologue*.

credited as a major patron of the arts in her time, and her court enjoyed the presence of numerous troubadours and trouvères⁵. The trouvères were inspired by the styles that the troubadours had brought with them from the South. These elements were assimilated into French culture by means of troubadour songs that expressed the frustration and sadness of the courtly lover due to the distance, whether physical, social or sentimental, that he experienced from a lady. The anguish that this distance created for the troubadour, provided *joie*, the inspiration needed to write his poems. The terms and values created by these poets are easily visible in Marie de France's texts.

Italian and Spanish sources also inspired the writings of troubadours by means of travelers that would visit l'Occitanie and also due to political events such as marriages and religious wars, that would lead poets away from their native soil. As we saw earlier, many French nobles arrived in Spain as pilgrims or as part of the Crusades with their entourages, which usually consisted of troubadours and other entertainers. Some of the troubadours were under vassalage to a lord and therefore dedicated a portion of their poems to these powerful men and women. Some of the famous troubadours were of noble descent, such as Guillaume IX, Count of Poitiers and Duke of Aquitaine (1071-

⁵*Troubadours* and *trouvères* are terms that reflect the geographic regions of France in the Middle Ages. *Troubadours* were poets from the region South of the Loire River, and *trouvères* are from the region North of the Loire.

1127), and Raimbaud d'Orange (c. 1150 and 1173), Count of Orange. The vassalage relationship between the troubadour and his lord became a mirror image for the poet's relationship with his lady. Since many troubadours were aristocrats they were familiar with the traditions of the court and the feudal divisions within medieval society. The following demonstrates an example of an *amor de lohn*⁶, an important element in troubadour poetry. The troubadour Jaufré Rudel wrote this poem from France to a lady in an exotic and foreign land.

Amors de terra lonhdana,
Per vos totz lo còrs mi dòl;
E no'n puèsc trobar meizina,
Si non vau al seu reclam.
Ab atraït d'amor doussana
Dins vergièr o sotz cortina
Ab desirada companha.

Pòs totz jorns m'en falh aizina,
No'm meravilh s'ieu n'aflam;
Car anc gênsen crestiana
No fo, ni Dieus non la vòl,
Juzéva ni Sarrazina;
Ben es celh pagutz de mana

⁶*Amor de lohn* is a term used to designate the troubadour's anguish and thus provides him with material to compose his verses (*Anthologie des Troubadours*, 79)

Qui ren de s'amor gazanha.

("Quan lo rius de la fontana", lines 8-21)⁷

The union of the lovers is not permitted by reasons of distance and social values such as religion. It is in these verses of the troubadour Jaufré Rudel that we see a reference made to the religious conflicts in the Iberian Peninsula. There are also some troubadour-influenced Spanish poets who surface in the Iberian Peninsula at that time who have copied the styles of the troubadours (Menéndez Pidal, 33-34).

Many troubadour compositions become sources for Northern poets. These courtly ideals exemplified in troubadour poetry were also were also adopted in other European countries, including Spain, as observed in Gonzalo de Berceo's text. It is thus significant to show that Marie de France integrated several of these elements in her narratives. Even though the texts that she chose for her collection are from

⁷The modern French translation provided for the above text of Jaufré Rudel's poem "Quan lo rius de la fontana" comes from the *Anthologie des Troubadours*. Edition bilingue de P. Bec. Paris: UGE, 1994. 81.

Amour de terre lointaine, pour vous tout mon coeur est dolent; et je ne puis trouver de remède, si je ne me rends à son appel, dans la charme d'un doux amour, en verger ou sous tenture, avec une amie désirée.

Mais puisque l'occasion m'en est toujours refusée, je ne m'étonne point d'être enflammé d'amour, car il ne fut jamais – Dieu ne le veut point! – de plus gente chrétienne, Juive ou Sarrazine. Celui-là est bien repu de manne qui gagne un peu de son amour.

("Quan lo rius de la fontana", lines 8-21)

traditional Breton or Norman folklore, a Southern influence is present. The most obvious influence is the use of feudal discourse which will be discussed in detail in this chapter. It is also important to note that both the knight and the lady, in the *Lais*, have all the valued personal qualities found in poems by troubadours: beauty, loyalty, bravery, and suffering. Just as in many of the troubadour poems, the enemy of the lovers, is often the third member in a love-triangle – the jealous and much older husband. Like the troubadours, some of the lovers portrayed by Marie are so distressed about their separation that they are inspired to write their story.

Marie de France has also been influenced by the traditions from the North: Bretagne, Normandy and England. Claude Lecouteux states in his book *Fées, Sorcières et Loups-Garous au Moyen Age*, that Marie has integrated key popular elements from the North into her narratives.

On n'ignore point combien Marie de France, née en Normandie, région de peuplement scandinave, et vivant en Angleterre dans l'entourage du roi Henri II Plantagenêt, était attentive aux traditions et aux croyances populaires (82).

It is because of these influences that Marie de France's *Lais* contain creatures of a supernatural world that are able to meet and affect the lives of her human characters.

Women and the Feudal System

Like the rest of Europe in the Middle Ages, France was using a feudal system. It was divided into a tripartite order that consists of

Bellatores (the knights), *Oratores* (the clergy), and *Laboratores* (the peasant workers). Even though all of these social layers are present in the *Lais*, the order most represented is the *Bellatores*. Because *Lais* addresses the members of a royal court, the subjects treated relate to the different functions and customs with which the audience is acquainted. The characters represented in these narratives are all of noble blood and they demonstrate the rules of their society. Looking at the three main social categories: *Oratores* (the clergy), *Bellatores* (the knights and lords), and *Laboratores* (labourers), we find that women are not included in any of them. Women were valued as ways of acquiring more wealth and power, as well as for their service to the Church. Their husbands and fathers treated them as possessions and they were expected to be loyal. As seen in the first two chapters, women in the Middle Ages did not have much freedom. Marie de France was one of the first women to embark in an otherwise male dominated profession. Brzezinski Potkay believes that Marie de France must have belonged to a religious order or to the noble class because she is able to read and write Latin.

That Marie was multilingual is self-evident from the kinds of poetic projects she undertakes. In her epilogue to the *Fables*, she relates that she has translated and versified King Alfred's Old English Aesopian fables. These fables confirm for us her knowledge of Latin as well. Marie's skillful use of various languages and classical sources suggests the kind of cathedral school or university education exclusively available to men - one that women could acquire only by entering a religious profession. We can surmise, then, that Marie had either exceptional private tutoring at court, that she was educated as a religious woman, or more likely, that she enjoyed some combination of these two available spheres of female education (Brzezinski Potkay, 80).

To further demonstrate her knowledge, Marie de France mentions in the *Prologue* of the *Lais*, the writings of a classical grammarian, Priscian (line 10), and her familiarity with the works of other classical writers. Marie also states how it is her obligation as a writer of the age to *gloss* the works of the classical writers in order to provide more insight for the future generations that will study this material (lines 9-22). Another clue to the education of Marie de France is her use of a rigid verse structure. This technique is obviously something that was taught to her in a formal setting, either at a university or by formal instruction. Marie's collection of narratives, which she apparently selected from among the numerous folk tales of Brittany and Normandy, stand as an indication of her well-rounded education. It also demonstrates that her texts were selected to satisfy her patron, the King. Even though she dedicates her work to this monarch, and more than likely chose what she thought he would enjoy, Marie gives the modern reader a glimpse of the roles that were reserved for some women in her society.

Medieval women of a privileged social class were forced to marry someone they did not love who was generally much older than they were; a woman was not allowed to choose her husband because her marriage was a contract between her father⁸ and her future husband. Marriage

⁸Another male relative, the next head of the family, could arrange a marriage between a woman and her future husband when the girl's father was dead.

was a union and brought prestige and wealth to both families. The new wife had a very important responsibility in maintaining the alliance between her families. She was to be a loyal wife in order not to disgrace the treaty that had been formed. According to Klapisch-Zuber, the only moment that a woman was allowed to voice her opinion in public was in the marriage ceremony (293). She would "consent" to the union when asked by the priest to do so. This agreement was established by the clergy in order to avoid possible charges of incest in marriages between distant cousins and also to avoid weddings of girls who were too young to understand the responsibility. Consent was created so the bride could refuse her betrothed if her parents forced her to "commit a sin" against her will.

Since aristocratic husbands and fathers regarded women in their families as possessions, violence was an element that often appeared in these relationships. As a person with hardly any rights, the medieval woman was controlled by men who were in charge of every aspect of her life to prevent her from bringing disharmony to her family and to her society. Male relatives guarded the woman, as she was thought to be incapable of controlling her impulses.

As God's first creation and his nearest image, and with his more perfect and stronger nature, man should dominate woman. These constantly reiterated themes found their application in the closed field of family life. They justified not only female subordination but the division of tasks that was its corollary. The man had a "natural" authority over his wife. (Klapisch-Zuber, 305).

A woman could not be blamed for her actions as it was believed that she did not possess reasoning, a quality that God had granted to men because they were created in His image. The Church promoted the spread of this belief by basing it on a biblical explanation (Schine Gold, 124). As we have already seen in Chapters 1 and 2, this biblical explanation is traced to the fall of Adam and Eve. Marie de France incorporated this aspect of medieval society into her narratives and demonstrates the physical and psychological violence executed by her male characters. On more than one occasion Marie mentions that a husband imprisoned his wife in a room to prevent her from being unfaithful.

Li sire, ki la mainteneit,
mult fu vielz huem e femme aveit,
une dame de halt parage,
franche, curteise, bele e sage.
Gelus esteit a desmesure;
car ceu purporte la nature
que tuit li vieil seient gelus;
mult het chascuns que il seit cus:
tels est d'eage li trespas.
Il ne la guardout mie a gas.
En un vergier suz le donjun
la out un clos tut environ.
De vert marbre fu li muralz,

mult par esteit espès e halz.
 N'I out fors une sule entrée;
 cele fu nuit e jur gardeë.
 De l'altrew par fu clos de mer;
 nuls n'I pout eissir ne entrer,
 se ceo ne fust od un batel,
 se busuin eüst al chastel.
 Li sire out fait dedenz le mur,
 pur metre I sa femme a seür,
 chambre; suz ciel n'aveit plus bele.

(Guigemar, lines 209-231)⁹

⁹ I was not able to find an English translation of the *Lais* that was true to the Harley 978 manuscript; therefore, I have used the modern French translation provided by Laurence Harf-Lancner in her edition of *Lais*.

Le seigneur de cette terre
 était un viellard qui avait épousé
 une dame de haut rang,
 noble, courtoise, belle et sage.
 La jalousie le dévorait:
 c'est dans la nature
 des vieillards d'être jaloux
 car personne ne supporte l'idée d'être cocu.
 Mais l'âge vous oblige à en passer par là.
 La pauvre femme n'était pas l'objet d'une surveillance pour rire.
 Dans un jardin, au pied du donjon,
 il y avait un enclos tout entouré
 d'un mur de marbre vert bien épais et haut.
 Il n'existait qu'une seule entrée,
 gardée nuit et jour.
 De l'autre côté, c'est la mer qui isolait le jardin:
 impossible d'y entrer ou d'en sortir
 sinon par bateau,
 lorsque le besoin s'en faisait sentir au château.
 A l'intérieur de la muraille, le seigneur avait fait construire,
 pour mettre sa femme en sûreté,
 une chambre, la plus belle qu'on puisse imaginer.

(Guigemar, lines 209-231)

Marie de France uses the age difference of her married couples as an important factor in their unhappiness and explains how it accounts for the jealous reactions of the husband. This example is very common in other contemporary texts and is referred to as the *malmariée* theme.

Malmariées in the Lais

Like Gonzalo de Berceo, Marie de France used several different themes in the composition of her *Lais*: the *malmariée*, the feudal loyalty agreement, the supernatural, legitimate and illegitimate children, public undressing, and the secrecy of a lover's name. The *malmariée* is found in practically all of her *lais*. These women, as the name suggests, are victims of their husbands' extreme jealousy and mental cruelty. This theme involves two main factors: the well-known love triangle of the married woman, her husband and her lover and the involvement of the narrator, who explains the violent nature of the husband and, most importantly, the difference in age between himself and his spouse. Because the husband is portrayed as a jealous old man, the wife is confined to a prison that he builds for her. As soon as her freedom is taken away, she becomes the *malmariée*. This theme is widely used in the texts of Marie de France and her contemporaries to justify the infidelities that occurred within love triangles.

Freedom is an illusion in the theme of the *malmariée*. The *lai Guigemar* demonstrates this point on several occasions. The woman is a

prisoner of her husband's jealousy because she is isolated from the rest of society. He builds her a room and only two people can see her: an impotent priest and her handmaiden. When Guigemar, a foreign knight, arrives on her estate, they become lovers. They exchange chastity belts as symbols of their promise to remain faithful to one another. Guigemar is forced to leave the estate because the husband discovers the affair. As punishment for her infidelity, the husband moves his wife to an even more isolated environment. She finally manages to escape the estate and she flees to find her lover. Although she is now reunited with her lover, she still belongs to her husband because it is not indicated that he has died, which would have guaranteed her a measure of liberty. Even though she finally finds "happiness", the woman continues to be a *malmariée* as she is bound to her marriage agreement.

Another example of the *malmariée* is found in the narrative *Le Rossignol*. A husband locks his wife up in her room. Such confinement leads her to communicate with her knight through a window. Her husband suspects that she is being "unfaithful" and he becomes very angry with her.

Tant i estut, tant i leva
que sis sire s'en curuça
e meintre feiz li demanda
pur quei levot e u ala.

(*Le Rossignol*, lines 79-82)¹⁰

To end his jealousy and his wife's affair, the husband plans to capture the bird that had "disturbed" her sleep the night before from outside their bedroom window. This bird, the *rossignol*, becomes a symbol of the forbidden love shared between the wife and her knight.

Quant li sire ot que ele dist,
d'ire e de maltalent est rist.
D'une chose se purpensa,
que l'aüstic enginera.

(*Le Rossignol*, lines 91-94)¹¹

Once the bird has been captured, the narrator describes the physical violence that the husband inflicts upon the defenseless animal, and how this act psychologically traumatizes his wife because of her disloyalty.

al seigneur fu renduz tuz vis.
Mult en fu liez, quand il le tint.
As chambres a la dame vint.

¹⁰ Mais la dame, à force de se lever pour venir à la fenêtre,
suscita la colère de son mari
qui lui demanda à plusieurs reprises
pourquoi elle se levait et où elle allait.
(*Le Rossignol*, lines 79-82)

¹¹ A ces mots, le mari,
furieux, a un sourire moqueur:
il décide
de prendre le rossignol au piège.
(*Le Rossignol*, lines 91-94)

'Dame', fet il, 'u estes vus?
 Venez avant! Parlez a nus!
 Jeo ai l'aüstic engignié
 pur quei vus avez tant veillé.
 Des or poëz gisir en pais;
 il ne vus esveillera mais!
 Quand la dame l'a entendu,
 dolente e cureçuse fu.
 A sun seignur l'a demandé,
 e il l'ocist par engresté.
 Le col li runt a ses dous meins:
 de ceo fist il que trop vileins.
 Sur la dame le cors geta,
 si que sun chainse en sangleta
 un poi desur le piz devant.

(*Le Rossignol*, lines 102- 119)¹²

¹² Celui-ci, tout heureux
 de le [the bird] tenir,
 entre dans la chambre de la dame.
 «Dame, dit-il, où êtes-vous donc?
 Venez me voir!
 J'ai capturé le rossignol
 qui vous a tant fait veiller!
 Désormais vous pouvez dormir tranquille,
 il ne vous réveillera plus!
 Triste et peinée,
 la dame, à ces mots,
 demande l'oiseau à son mari
 qui le tue par pure méchanceté,
 en lui tordant le cou:
 il avait bien l'âme d'un vilain!
 Il jette sur la dame le cadavre,
 qui tache de sang sa robe,
 sur le devant, juste à l'endroit du cœur.

(*Le Rossignol*, lines 102- 119)

Most of the married female characters in the *Lais* are *malmariées*. They must bear the jealousy and abuse of their husbands. This *topos* is widely used in courtly narratives to justify the infidelities that take place in the texts.

Marie de France also portrays a jealous father in her *Lais*, who sets his daughter in a "prison" for his own personal happiness. In the case of *Les Deux Amants*, a King creates an impossible challenge for his daughter's suitors. He claims that they must individually carry her up a very steep cliff, and the one lucky enough to succeed will be permitted to marry her. The King invents this challenge after receiving increased pressure from his nobles to marry off his daughter because their relationship appears incestuous.

Li reis ot une fille, bele
e mult curteise dameisele,
Fiz ne fille fors li n'aveit;
forment l'amout e cherisseit.
De riches humes fu requise,
ki volontiers l'eüssent prise;
mes li reis ne la volt doner,
car ne s'en poeit consirer.

(*Les Deux Amants*, lines 21-28)¹³

¹³ Ce roi avait une fille,
belle et courtoise demoiselle.
C'était son seul enfant
et il l'aimait et la chérissait tendrement.
De puissants seigneurs avaient demandé sa main
et l'auraient volontiers épousée.
Mais le roi ne voulait la donner à personne
car il ne pouvait s'en séparer.

(*Les Deux Amants*, lines 21-28)

The pressure exerted by the nobles could also be attributed to the lines of descent. If the King's daughter does not marry and has children, the whole feudal order could be in chaos. The King would not benefit from alliances with other wealthy and powerful families, and the daughter would not be able to pass down her father's kingdom to her husband and eventually to her children. Because the King is putting the feudal order in danger, he is described in the same way as the jealous husbands in the *Lais*: he is old and determined to keep his daughter "imprisoned". By presenting an impossible challenge to her suitors, he guarantees that she will remain his possession.

Many of the *Lais'* female characters are allowed to speak. The women are able to express themselves to their husbands and to their lovers. The dialogues between the lady and her husband are inserted into the narrative by Marie de France to demonstrate the difficult conditions that surfaced in a feudal marriage. Jealous husbands in the *Lais* lash out against their wives with insults. The narrator criticizes the husband by employing negative adjectives when describing him. It is because of these descriptions that the female character is justified in her infidelity. Like the women described by Eileen Power in *Medieval Women*, Marie's female characters feel no affection toward their husbands (23-24). Even Andreas Capellanus (c. XII Century) states in "The Rules of Love" of *The*

Art of Courtly Love: "Nothing forbids one woman being loved by two men or one man by two women" (43). Since most marriages were arranged, love was not given the same importance in a relationship as it is today. These alliances were created for the sole purpose of preserving the status of the families. Andreas Capellanus is aware of this situation and shows his approval of love outside the marriage.

The knights and ladies' husbands in Marie de France's *Lais* are depicted as violent men. The lady in the *lai Guigemar* is treated as a character subject to external control. She is isolated from her own society because her husband feared her infidelity and once she is discovered with her lover, the husband locks her up in a tower. The lady escapes her prison and travels to Guigemar's land in search of him where she is exposed to public humiliation and violence by Mériaduc, Guigemar's lord, as he attempts to rape her. Mériaduc later invites all of his vassals to attempt to remove her chastity belt, an object pointing to another instance of restrictions upon her liberty. Marie de France demonstrates another topos in this *lai*, the attempted rape of the lady by Mériaduc's knights and her public undressing.

si [Mériaduc] li respunt par maltalent:

'Altresi a en cest païs

un chevalier de mult grant pris:

de femme prendre en itel guise

se defent par une chemise,

dunt li destre pans est pleiez;

il ne puet estre desliēz

ki force u cultel n'i metreit.

Vus feïtes, ceo quit, cel pleit!

Quant el l'oï, si suspira,
 pur un petit ne se pasma.
 Il la reçut entre ses braz.
 De sun blialt trencha les laz;
 la ceinture voleit ovrir.
 Puis n'ot el païs chevalier,
 que il n'i feïst essaier.

(*Guigemar*, lines 726-742)¹⁴

The humiliation of being undressed in front of everyone is also seen in one of Gonzalo de Berceo's *milagros*: "De cómo una abbadesa fue prennada et por su conbento fue acusada et después por la Virgen librada". In this text, the Abbess is disrobed in front of the Bishop and his priests to determine if she is pregnant. Once they discover that there are no signs of pregnancy on her body, they leave her alone.

¹⁴ Il [Mériaduc] lui répond alors, furieux:

«Il y a aussi dans ce pays
 un valereux chevalier
 qui refuse de prendre femme
 au nom d'une chemise,
 dont le pan droit est plié:
 on ne peut la dénouer
 sans couteaux ou ciseaux.
 N'auriez-vous pas fait ce noeud vous-même?»
 A ces mots, elle soupire
 et manque s'évanouir.
 Mériaduc la reçoit dans ses bras
 et coupe les lacets de sa robe;
 il voulait ouvrir la ceinture,
 mais en vain.
 Plus tard il fit tenter l'épreuve
 par tous les chevaliers du pays.

(*Guigemar*, lines 726-742).

Evil Female Characters

Even though women are portrayed as victims of spousal abuse in many of the *lais*, there are also some cases in which she is the victimizer. As we have observed earlier, the *malmariées* are forgiven for their adulteries because of the cruel actions of their jealous husbands. However, in two *lais*, *Bisclavret* and *Equitan*, a woman is punished for plotting against her husband. In the first text, a wife betrays her husband when she discovers that he turns into a werewolf. Because she is afraid of him, she hides his clothes, the cultural elements necessary for him to become human again, and thus he is forced to remain a werewolf. The narrator explains how the wife replaces her husband with a former suitor. Her cruelty and her disregard for feudal contracts must be followed by an equally cruel consequence. Once *Bisclavret* sees his wife again, he attacks her and he rips off her nose with his jowls.

Quant Bisclavret la veit venir,
nuls heum nel poeit retenir:
vers licurut cum enragiez.
Oëz cum il s'est bien vengiez!
Les nes li esracha del vis.

(*Bisclavret*, lines 231-235)¹⁵

¹⁵ Quand Bisclavret la voit venir,
nul ne peut le retenir.
Il se précipite sur elle, comme pris de rage.
il s'est bien vengé, écoutez comment:
il lui a arraché le nez:

(*Bisclavret*, lines 231-235)

The King sympathizes with his loyal subject and he banishes the wife and her second husband for attempting to subvert the rules of the feudal order. As a hereditary mark for her disloyalty to her husband, all of her female offspring are born without noses.

La femme a del païs ostee
e chanciee de la cuntree.
Cil s'en ala ensemble od li,
pur qui sun seignur ot traï.
Enfanz en a asez eūz,
puis unt esté bien cuneūz
e del semblant e del visage:
plusurs des femmes del lignage,
c'est veritez, senz nes sunt nees
e si viveient esnasees.

(*Bisclavret*, lines 305-314)¹⁶

¹⁶ Quant à la femme, il l'a bannie
et chassée du pays.
Elle partit avec l'homme
pour qui elle avait trahi son époux.
Elle en a eu beaucoup d'enfants,
bien reconnaissables ensuite
à leur air et à leur visage:
car bien des femmes de leur lignage,
c'est la vérité, naquirent
et vécurent sans nez.

(*Bisclavret*, lines 305-314)

This hereditary trait is comparable to the guilt passed on to all women by Eve's sin in the Garden.

The other *lai* that demonstrates the victimization of a husband by his wife occurs in *Equitan*. Once again feudal loyalty is at the center of this text. The King chooses the wife of a loyal *sénéchal* as a lover. He convinces her that he will not marry anyone else and so they plot the murder of her husband.

E jeo ferai les bains temprer
e les dous cuves apoter.
Sun bain ferai chalt e buillant;
suz ciel nen a hume vivant,
ne seit eschaldez e malmis,
einz que dedenz se seit asis.
Quant morz sera e eschaldez,
voz humes e les soens mandez;
si lur mustrez cumfaitement

est morz el bain sudeinement.'

(*Equitan*, lines 257-266)¹⁷

¹⁷ [«. . .]Moi [the wife], je ferai chauffer l'eau des bains
et préparer les deux cuves.
Je ferai chauffer l'eau de son bain:
n'importe qui
serai ébouillanté et brûlé
avant même d'y être assis.
Quand il sera mort, brûlé,
vous n'aurez qu'à appeler vos hommes et les siens
et leur montrer comment

This situation is reminiscent of the biblical story of David and Bathsheba, with the difference that Bathsheba does not participate in the sinister plot to eliminate her husband. The *sénéchal*'s death is carefully plotted but poorly executed. The narrator does not forgive the infidelity of the King and the *sénéchal*'s wife because they have disregarded the loyalty contracts of the feudal system. Since the narrator does not provide evidence of cruelty or jealousy by the *sénéchal*, there is no textual justification for her evil plot to kill him. The narrator therefore makes certain that the wife is punished according to her evil nature.

Icil le fiert par tel aïr,
par force li estut ovrir.
Le rei e sa femme a trovez
el lit gisant entracolez.
Li reis guarda, s'il vit venir.
Pur sa vileinie covrir,
dedenz la cuve salt joinz piez,
e il fu nuz e despuillez;
unques garde ne s'en dona.
Iluec murut e eschalda.
Sur lui est li mals revertiz,

il est mort soudainement dans son bain.»

(*Equitan*, lines 257-266)

e cil en est sals e guariz.
Li seneschals a bien veü
coment del rei est avenu.
Sa femme prent demeintenant:
el bain la met, le chief avant.
Issi mururent ambedui,
li reis avant, ele après lui.

(*Equitan*, lines 295-312)¹⁸

The narrator describes how the wife and the King pay for their cruelty because of their disloyalty to the rules of the feudal society.

The female characters in *Bisclavret* and in *Equitan* are the only truly evil women depicted by Marie de France in her *Lais*. Marie demonstrates through these characters the disharmony that can occur

¹⁸ Il [the *sénéchal*] frappe si fort
qu'elle est obligée de lui ouvrir
et il découvre alors le roi et sa femme
enlacés sur le lit.
Quand le roi le voit arriver,
il tente de cacher sa honte
en sautant à pieds joints dans la cuve,
par mégarde,
complètement nu.
Il meurt ébouillanté.
Le piège s'est retourné contre lui,
alors que le *sénéchal* y a échappé.
Ce dernier a bien vu
ce qui est arrivé au roi.
Il se saisit aussitôt de sa femme
et la jette dans le bain, la tête la première.
Ainsi moururent les deux amants,
le roi d'abord, la dame après lui.

(*Equitan*, lines 295-312)

when tampering with the feudal order. In comparison to other female characters in the *Lais*, who are not ambitious, they must pay for disrupting the hierarchy. They are punished accordingly. The woman in *Bisclavret* must bear the physical mark of her disloyalty as do her future generations; the other is condemned to death.

Saintly Female Characters

June Hall McCash argues in her article "Images of Women in the *Lais* of Marie de France", that Marie de France needs to balance the two really bad women with two others who are almost saintly (97). The good women in Marie's text are Frêne and Guideluec. These two women, in opposition to the bad ones, are essentially martyrs of their social class and their families.

The *lai Le Frêne* begins with Frêne's mother rejecting her because she was a twin. It was believed in the Middle Ages that multiple births were a sign of a wife's infidelity, therefore the mother drops off her newborn daughter outside a convent. Before the mother leaves her child, she attaches a ring to the infant and covers her with a precious shawl. These gifts to the baby are evidence that she was from a noble home. This child grows up without having access to the privileges guaranteed by her birthright, with the exception of education, as a nun at the convent teaches her. Later in the *lai* she becomes the lover of a wealthy and powerful knight but because of her low status, she is unable to marry him. Goron, her lover, marries her twin sister Coudrier because

she could provide him with heirs, power, and wealth. Frêne demonstrates no jealousy or anger toward her sister and accepts this union.

Les noces tindrent richement;
mult i out esbaneiement.
La dameisele es chambres fu;
unques de quan qu'ele a veü
ne fist semblant que li pesast
sul tant qu'ele s'en curuçast.
Entur la dame bonement
serveit mult afaitieement.
A grant merveille le teneient
cil e celes ki la veeient.

(*Le Frêne*, lines 383-392)¹⁹

To further demonstrate her goodness, she even volunteers to prepare the bridal suite and decorates it using her precious shawl (lines 399-415). Her selflessness is what makes her a martyr to the rules of feudal society

¹⁹ Les noces sont magnifiques,
il y a force réjouissances.
Frêne reste dans les appartements:
à tout ce qu'elle voit,
elle n'oppose pas la moindre marque de chagrin
ni de colère.
Elle sert la jeune épouse
avec grâce et bonté,
à l'admiration
de tous les spectateurs.

(*Le Frêne*, lines 383-392)

and therefore she is rewarded with her birthright and a marriage to Goron at the end of the *lai*.

There is another character in Marie de France's *Lais* that demonstrates selflessness. Guideluec gives up her marriage and enters a convent so that her husband could be free to marry his mistress. Guideluec confesses her plans of entering a convent to Guilliadon, her husband's mistress, so that he might be happy again. She is not jealous or angry with him and she does not resent the other woman in his life.

Jo suis s'esouse veirement;
mult ai pur lui mun quer dolent.
Pur la dolur que il menot
saveir voleie u il alot
Après lui vinc, si vus trovai:
qui vive estes, grant joie en ai.
Ensemble od mei vus en merrai
e a vostre ami vus rendrai.
Del tut le vueil quite clamer,
e si ferai mun chief veler.'
Tant l'a la dame confortee
qu'ensemble od li l'en a menee.

(*Eliduc*, lines 1093-1104)²⁰

²⁰ [« . . .] Je suis son épouse, c'est vrai,
et mon cœur souffre pour lui.
Il montrait tant de douleur
que j'ai voulu savoir où il allait;
je l'ai suivi et je vous ai trouvée.
Mais vous êtes vivante et cela me comble de joie.
Je vais vous emmener avec moi

Like Frêne, Guideluéc is rewarded for her unselfish actions. She establishes her own religious order and enjoys the rest of her life serving her new lord, Christ. Her final reward is her guaranteed salvation as she has sacrificed her earthly goods and happiness for a more holy life.

The Importance of Inheritance

An issue that we have lightly touched upon in the *lai Le Frêne*, is that of inheritance. As we saw, descendants were guaranteed the transfer of power and wealth from generation to generation. Marriages were arranged by families to form alliances and women would either marry someone of a higher social level, thus bringing prestige to their entire family, or they could marry someone of a lower social class who was wealthy, as they did once merchants became more powerful in society. These two types of marriages serve as markers of the main time periods in the Middle Ages: the Early and Late Middle Ages. During the Early Middle Ages, there were still nobles marrying in order to acquire more land and wealth. In the Late Middle Ages, since the land had already been divided and the wealth spent, nobles were now willing to

et vous rendre à votre ami.
Je veux lui redonner sa liberté
et puis je prendrai le voile.»
La dame a donc réconforté la jeune fille
et l'a emmenée avec elle.

(*Eliduc*, lines 1093-1104)

marry into the families of the successful merchant class in order to survive economically.

Many women, perhaps the majority, thus found themselves degraded socially by their marriages, given to husbands of inferior blood or rank to whom they nonetheless owed obedience (Klapisch-Zuber, 289).

Klapisch-Zuber mentions that women who were born into a higher social class than their husbands often rebelled against their wifely duties.

The embittered, quarrelsome wife who incessantly reminds her husband of his lower birth is a constant theme in medieval literature, as is the companion theme of male fear of affronting such a dragon bristling with family crests and genealogies (289).

Children who were born from successful alliances would benefit economically and socially as they inherited their family's lineage. The high number of children born to a medieval couple did not guarantee that they would all outlive their parents. In fact, most of these children would die before they reached early adulthood. Because of the low survival rate in children, inheritance was a very important issue in affluent medieval households. Marie de France demonstrates this preoccupation throughout the *Lais*: her characters have very few children, at the most, two.

The most appropriate example of inheritance is found in *Le Frêne*. This *lai* deals with the conflict between legitimate and illegitimate children. According to Erik Kooper in his article "Multiple Births and Multiple Disaster: Twins in Medieval Literature", the popular belief at the

time was that twins were the result of an infidelity in the marriage (254). Because the mother in this story gives birth to twins, the question of inheritance becomes very relevant. Each child in *Le Frêne* has the right to claim her birthright; however, the mother chooses to conceal one daughter so that the inheritance will not be divided. Frêne, the abandoned child, receives a ring and a shawl from her mother. She is raised and educated by a nun because her mother's gifts indicated that she was from a privileged home. Deprived of her rightful privileges, she is not able to marry someone of her original social rank. In order to preserve the lines of inheritance, Goron, Frêne's lover, is advised that he should marry a woman who can provide him with lands and wealth; a great inheritance for his descendents. His counselors go as far as to compare the two women to the trees that their names represent: Frêne, an ash tree, and Coudrier a hazelnut tree.

Pur le Fraisne que vus larrez
en eschange la Codre avrez.
En la coldre a noïz e deduiz,
li fraisnes ne porte unkes fruiz.

(*Le Frêne*, lines 347-350)²¹

²¹ Vous laisserez là le frêne
et prendrez en échange le coudrier:
le coudrier donne de délicieuses noisettes
alors que le frêne ne porte jamais le moindre fruit.
(*Le Frêne*, lines 347-350).

The men use this metaphor to demonstrate how Coudrier is a desirable asset because she will give her future husband wealth and many children. Frêne is not a good candidate for any of the elements needed in inheritance. As her name suggests, she will not be able to provide him with any land or wealth or children, factors that are very important in maintaining the feudal system. Because of these faults, Frêne is condemned to a life of service. Marie de France shows how inheritance was the decisive factor in marriage and how "illegitimate" children were a threat to the feudal hierarchy.

If inheritance was so important, what happened to illegitimate children? As seen in *Le Frêne*, illegitimate children suffered many social obstacles. An illegitimate child born to a wife could very easily be passed as a legitimate child. If this action was taken, a fraud was committed against the feudal hierarchy. It corrupted the sacredness of inheritance, the honour of a woman, her family and most importantly, her husband (Duby: 1991, 63). If a child was born as a result of the husband's adultery, although illegitimate, the child's father's identity was not a matter of concern. Children from an adulterous relationship were struck from the family's inheritance but they were not excluded from society altogether. A male child would be incorporated as a defender of his father's castle or homestead.

Most adult male sexual activity was inevitably illicit, and the number of bastard offspring consequently increased, although in fact they were not the prime cause of unrest. The majority were destined for a career in arms, and were probably better integrated within the family group than their legitimate brothers, since their total exclusion from the inheritance meant that they were allowed to stay in the family home (Duby: 1991, 63).

These children were permitted to live and work on their father's land until their death. Their legitimate brothers had to leave their father's house and move to another nobleman's household at the end of their childhood. These legal children, once adults, stayed at the noble's house and hoped that he would provide lands and wives for them (Stephenson, 37). Because inheritances were so scarce, only the heir of a family remained at his father's house. This son or daughter was married off to someone who was of the same social status, and by so doing allowing their heir to inherit his land. The male children sent to the noble's household would become knights and through their loyalty to their new lord, would reap the benefits of vassalage. Marie de France gives an example of this relationship in one of her *lais*, *Milon*. This particular story is similar to *Le Frêne*, because the mother has an "illegitimate" child without being married. Unlike the mother in *Le Frêne*, she is not able to conceal her child as her husband's offspring. If she had been discovered, her actions would have been condemned by society and she would have disgraced her family. The illegitimate child has no rights to his mother's inheritance or to an education as a knight. The newborn is taken away by his father immediately after birth and given to his sister, who makes certain that he is educated. After the son is ready, he fights in tournaments and receives a reputation that rivals his father's. This *lai* is an exception to Duby's statement because the circumstances that surround the birth of the son are different.

Dowries also played an important role in marriages as they were considered as a gift from the bride's father to her husband. In theory, the dowry was to be returned to the bride when she was widowed to ensure that she would be cared for properly after her husband's death. Land-ownership was also a part of marriage in the early Middle Ages. The husband administered the lands and at his death, they would be transferred to the heir. In some instances when there was no male heir, the daughter inherited the land, as was the case with Eleanor of Aquitaine. Upon the daughter's marriage, the husband received the lands. If for some reason a marriage was dissolved, the wife could take back her lands and dowry.

Eleanor was heiress to a third state, smaller in scale, admittedly, but still considerable: Aquitaine, a province extending from Poitiers to Bordeaux, with designs on Toulouse. When she changed her husband, she took her rights to the duchy with her (Duby, 1997, 9)²².

Because marriages were arranged, the male relative responsible for the bride had to ensure that the suitor would be a suitable match meaning that he had come from a good lineage, or he would have to have something to offer to the family. There are very few cases of women selecting their own husbands. These marriages usually were penalized for their unconventionality with heavy taxation.

²²Divorce was permitted until the mid-twelfth century, marriage was then declared one of the seven sacraments by the Church in order to control this occurrence. A famous divorce case based on consanguinity prior to the declaration of marriage as a sacrament came from Eleanor of Aquitaine. She divorced her first husband, Louis VII in 1152, so that she could marry Henry II (Duby, 1997, 9)

Grown women could also be summarily married off, unless (as not infrequently happened) they could purchase from their lords the right to marry whom they would and when they would. The kings as well as most feudal magnates reaped considerable income from fines paid by heiresses and widows for leave to choose their own husbands (Power, 40)

Eileen Power explains how marriages were conveniently arranged to improve the condition of the family.

In the first place it [love] was held to be impossible between husband and wife. "Marriage is no excuse for not loving" is the first of the rules of love. It was based on the conviction that affection binding married persons – though real and valuable – had nothing in common with the sentiment of love; which might, and indeed must, therefore, be sought outside marriage. Conditions which governed feudal marriages are sufficient to explain the dogma which sounds so perverse to modern ears. It was the essence of courtly love that it be a thing freely sought and freely given; it could not be found in the marriage of feudalism, which was so often a parental arrangement, binding children in the interests of land. Fiefs marry but men and women love. True, the adored lady was always a wife but always someone else's wife. This was one of the rules of the game (Power, 23-24)

True love was usually found outside the marriage, and so, the woman would many times find herself in a love-triangle that included her lover and her husband. Most unions in Marie de France's *Lais* are arranged and appear very unhappy; this was the reality of life in a noble society.

Noble women embraced many new responsibilities after their marriage. They were expected to run a household and manage the fief in the absence of their husbands; they managed the peasants living on their land, the production of goods, paid the taxes to their lord and solved legal matters. Women of higher social classes were probably well educated so they could manage the estate more easily. Added to these

“masculine” duties, these women were also responsible for raising their children and for looking after the house. There is one specific case, in *Eliduc*, where the wife must take on these responsibilities. She and the fief are left under her husband’s vassals supervision.

Ne vult el país arester,
ainz passera, ceo dit, la mer;
el reialme de Loegre ira
e une piece deduira.
Sa femme en la terre larra;
a ses humes cumandera
que li la guardent leialment
e tuit a si ami ensement.’

(*Eliduc*, lines 67-74)²³

Eliduc’s vassals have a continuing interest in the fief because their lord could eventually reward them for being loyal servants. It was important for them to supervise the wife in order to prevent her from having an affair and from squandering away the wealth generated by the lands.

²³ *Eliduc* ne veut plus rester dans le pays:
il traversera la mer
pour séjourner quelque temps
dans le royaume de Logres.
Il laissera sa femme sur sa terre
et recommande à ses vassaux
ainsi qu’à ses amis
de veiller sur elle loyalement.

(*Eliduc*, lines 67-74)

The Tripartite Order: *Bellatores*

Kings

The social status of the Middle Ages was divided into a tripartite order, *Bellatores*, *Oratores* and *Laboratores*. The major social class that is represented in the *Lais* is the *Bellatores*. This social class, and highest level of the tripartite order, consisted of knights and nobles, who were considered as the rulers of the medieval world. The King is at the apex of this social hierarchy. All of the other men in the *Bellatores* are indirectly or directly vassals to the King. The feudal society has two components: a vassal and a lord. Even though the King is at the top of the earthly hierarchy, he still has to serve a higher entity. Because he was placed on earth by divine right, his lord was God. The Church functioned according to a similar hierarchical structure, but it had different levels that excluded the members of feudal society. The King, as supreme ruler over all of his barons and other vassals, was expected to rule with justice and wisdom. These were very important qualities and the *Lais* often make reference to these highly valued traits. The King is expected to select counselors and members of his entourage wisely and to avoid bribery, unjust rulings and bad advice from his nobles. As the overseer of the feudal hierarchy, he must be charitable and protect those less fortunate than himself. This last point is beneficial to him as well

because his subjects will be more willing to fight for him if he demonstrates his concern for them.

Nobles

The next level after the King in the feudal hierarchy is the grouping of nobles. They are responsible for the knights and the proper distribution of the fief that the King entrusted to them. Nobles are expected to be loyal to their lord and to protect the values that are exemplified by the King: justice, wisdom and charity. Barons were also responsible for educating knights on their estates and later for finding them suitable wives.

Knights

Knights are vassals to the barons. Like the baron, a knight was also expected to assume a position of leadership. It was his responsibility to manage his land and the serfs living and working on it. Like the King and the baron, the knight was expected to rule his vassals with wisdom and justice. If there was civil unrest on his land, he was expected to solve the situation. They were also expected to contribute financially, with materials and horses in the event that a war should occur.

For the defense of his territory, likewise, the lord could require his vassals to perform only whatever service they owed for their fiefs, while ordinary men of the countryside might have to dig ditches, repair fortifications, cart supplies, or fight on foot with inferior weapons.[. . .] A fief might thus

be made to furnish auxiliary troops, horses, arms, or other useful objects; members of a princely household might receive fiefs in return for the performance of their official duties (Stephenson, 33 and 35).

As we saw earlier, a baron was also responsible for the education and training of his knights' sons. The knights who would prove their loyalty in battle received fiefs and, in many cases, a good marriage was arranged for them. Fiefs were "inherited" with the approval of the baron. The heir of the fief had to prove his loyalty to his lord at a ceremony in order to receive his land legally. Loyalty to a lord was the element that solidified the feudal system for so many centuries.

Knights are portrayed as loyal subjects and protectors of honor and truth, but they are also portrayed in literature as adventurers. When a knight completed his training, he would participate in tournaments, embark on a personal quest, or fight in a battle. Tournaments were greatly encouraged by the aristocracy in times of peace, as an opportunity for knights to practice their skills and to entertain the elite. According to Cardini, the Church banned tournaments because they promoted excessive and unnecessary violence; they were also considered as breeding grounds for the seven deadly sins (98)²⁴. The Church even went as far as to refuse sacred burials if a knight had perished in a tournament (99-100). Despite the negative feelings surrounding tournaments, Marie de France chooses to

²⁴The seven deadly sins are pride, anger, sloth, envy, greed, gluttony, and lust.

write about one in her *Lais*, *Le Malheureux*, precisely to expose the inherent dangers. This narrative tells about the life of a lady who has four lovers, each one a knight. In a tournament, she loses three of these men to fatal injuries and the fourth man is paralyzed from the waist-down.

Li turneiemenz cumença,
li reng crurent, mult espessa.
Devant la porte meinte feiz
fu le jur meslez li turneiz.
Si quatre dru bien le faiseient,
si que de tuz le pris aveient,
tant que ceo vint a l'avesprer
que il deveient desevrer.
Trop folement s'abandonerent
luinz de lur gent, sil cumparerent:
Kar li trei i furent ocis
e li quarz nafrez e malmis
par mi la quisse e enz el cors
si que la lance parut fors.

(*Le Malhereux*, lines 111-124)²⁵

²⁵ Alors le tournoi commence,
les rangs des chevaliers s'allongent, la foule épaissit.
Devant la porte, ce jour-là,
les combats se multiplient.
Les exploits des quatre amants
leurs valent d'être reconnus pour les meilleurs.
Mais à la tombée du jour,
alors qu'on allait se séparer,
ils s'exposent au danger, loin des leurs,
avec trop d'imprudence et le paient bien cher:

The deaths of the three knights and the paralysis of the fourth demonstrate the dangers that were present in the tournament.

Knights were bound to serve their lord. This feudal contract was annulled if the lord or the vassal had been unjust or if the knight committed adultery with the lord's or vassal's wife; this would result in the knight's having to go in search of another lord. We have already seen in some of Marie de France's texts how the ties of a feudal agreement have been broken. In *Equitan*, the King plots to murder his vassal so that he can marry this man's wife. Another case occurs with King Arthur, who forgets to reward his servant, Lanval, for his loyalty and service. This allows the vassal to search for another lord.

Refusal to Name a Lover

Knights often left their lands to search for adventures. By leaving the safety of their fiefs, they were exposed to the unusual wonders of the road. The *Lais* do not reveal any dangers for the knights; however, if we recall Geremek's comments in Chapter 2, we are reminded that meetings with supernatural creatures took place on the open road (348). The most commonly studied *lai* that deals with the subject of the supernatural is *Lanval*. The title character leaves his lord's castle and encounters a group of female fairies in the woods. There are certain elements that

trois d'entre eux trouvent la mort
et le quatrième est grièvement blessé
à la cuisse et au corps:
la lance le transperce.

(*Le Malhereux*, lines 111-124)

Marie de France incorporates into her narratives to demonstrate the appearance of these supernatural beings. For instance, she mentions that Lanval retreats to a forest in order to contemplate the King's injustice toward him. As Miléna Mikhaïlova and Andrzej Dziędzic mention in their articles, the forest already held certain connotations for a medieval audience; the forest was perceived as a transition zone between the supernatural and the natural world (Dziędzic, 390; Mikhaïlova, 146). At this place, the two worlds would come together. As the fairy tells Lanval, nobody from the real world, other than himself, will be able to see her (lines 143-149). Lanval is not even permitted to tell others that she exists, otherwise she will never appear before him again; this is a frequently visited *topos* in courtly literature, the refusal to name a lover. As we have already seen, agreements in the Middle Ages were sacred, whether it was to a lord or to a lady. R. Howard Bloch has studied this *topos* in his book *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*. He talks about "La Chastelaine de Vergi" a text that is contemporary to Marie de France's collection. This text involves the love triangle that is found in the literature of the age and places in question the issue of loyalty. The duchess accuses the knight of attacking her, and her husband wants vengeance for this betrayal of their feudal agreement. The knight explains, once he is under great pressure, that he is in love with somebody else, but he cannot name who she is because that would be a betrayal of his vow of secrecy to the Chatelaine. The refusal to name his lover breaks two agreements: her marriage vows to her husband and the knight's loyalty to her. As Bloch explains,

The refusal to name a lady, for example, in keeping with the courtly code, is here extended to the denial of names to all characters, who are thereby reduced to types, instruments of a machine of fate, that, once in motion, cannot be recalled – the duke, the duchess, the knight, the chatelaine (117).

This topos is found in Marie de France's *lai*, *Lanval*. The title character is in the same situation as the knight in "La Chastelaine de Vergi". Lanval has made an oath to his lover, a fairy princess, whom he will never reveal. The reason for this secrecy comes from her warning that if he betrays their agreement, she will never appear to him again. Before Guinevere accuses Lanval of attacking her, he confesses that he loves another woman but does not name her, thus remaining loyal to their agreement. As a result of his loyalty to her, the fairy returns to him during his trial. She rewards Lanval by telling the Court that he has always been a loyal vassal to the King and that it was Guinevere who tried to seduce him. His silence is vital to their relationship and demonstrates the secrecy between lovers in their "love contract".

Representations of the Oratores

The *Bellatores* social class is the one most represented in the *Lais* by Marie de France, however, reference is also made to the *Oratores*, the other main social class in the Middle Ages. This class appears in the narratives to perform a marriage ceremony, or to redeem the souls of sinful characters. The *Lais* are essentially courtly narratives and therefore have very little to do with religion, but as with most aspects of

the Middle Ages, its presence is still felt. The Church manifests itself on a physical level in the space encountered by characters as they come upon convents, monasteries and secluded chapels in the woods. One of the few mentions Marie de France makes with respect to members of the ecclesiastical order can be seen in *Le Frêne*. An Archbishop emerges in the narrative to perform an “unjust” marriage ceremony. The marriage in this *lai* is considered unjust because the groom, Goron, is marrying Frêne's sister, Coudrier. The Archbishop rectifies the situation by marrying Frêne and Goron after it is revealed that she is also of noble descent.

Sis pere ne volt plus atendre;
il meïsmes vet pur sun gendre
e l'erceveske i amena,
cele aventure li cunta.
Li chevaliers quant il le sot,
unkes si grant joie nen ot.
L'erceveskes a cunseillié
que issi seit la nuit laissié;
el demain les departira,
lui e celi espusera.

(*Le Frêne*, lines 503-512)²⁶

²⁶ Sans vouloir attendre d'avantage,
son père va lui-même chercher son gendre
et l'archevêque
en leur racontant l'aventure.
A cette nouvelle, le chevalier
éprouve la plus grande joie de sa vie!

There is another religious character in this *lai*, the abbess who raises Frêne. It is under the care of this woman that Frêne cultivates her forgiving and selfless attitude, qualities that reward her at the end of the text.

The *lai Eliduc* also offers an example of religious characters, although not from a high-ranking position within the ecclesiastical order. As seen earlier in this chapter, the wife in *Eliduc*, Guildeluec, founds a convent and enters a holy life. As Eliduc becomes older, he decides that he and his new wife should join a monastic order to atone for their sins. It is only by joining a religious order that they will be able to enjoy paradise. He donates great wealth to his chosen monastery and then he enters a holy life. Before he does this, however, he provides for his second wife's salvation by getting her to join the first wife's convent.

Ensemble vesquirent meint jur,
mult ot entre els parfite amur.
Granz almosnes e granz biens firent,
tant que a Deu se cunvertirent.
Pres del chastel de l'autre part
par grant conseil e par esguart

L'archevêque conseille
d'arrêter là la cérémonie;
le lendemain, il annulera le premier mariage
et unira Frêne et Goron.

(*Le Frêne*, lines 503-512)

une eglise fist Elidus,
 e de sa terre i mist le plus
 e tut sun or e sun argent;
 humes i mist e altre gent
 pur tenir l'ordre e la maisun.
 Quant tut aveit apareillié,
 nen a puis guaires atargié:
 ensemble od els se dune e rent
 pur servir Deu omnipotent.
 Ensemle od sa femme premiere
 mist sa femme que tant ot chiere.
 El la receut cum sa serur
 e mult li porta grant honur;
 de Deu servir l'amonesta
 e sun ordre li enseigna.

(*Eliduc*, lines 1149-1170)²⁷

27 Ils ont vécu ensemble pendant de longues années,
 s'aimant toujours d'un parfait amour,
 distribuant aumônes et bienfaits,
 jusqu'au jour où ils se sont donnés à Dieu.
 De l'autre côté du château,
 Eliduc a mis tous ses soins
 à faire bâtir une église,
 pour laquelle il a donné la plus grande partie de sa terre,
 tout son or et son argent:
 il y a installé des vassaux à lui et d'autres hommes
 de la plus grande pitié
 pour respecter la règle de ce nouveau couvent.
 Quand tout a été prêt,
 ils les a rejoints
 sans plus attendre
 et a fait vœu de servir Dieu tout-puissant.
 A sa première épouse
 il a confié la seconde, qu'il aimait tant;
 et elle l'a reçue comme sa soeur,
 avec les plus grands égards.
 Guildeluec a encouragé Eliduc à se mettre au service de Dieu

As already seen in the chapters dealing with Gonzalo de Berceo, the medieval monastery was supported by donations of lands and monetary wealth. It was a common held belief that only members of the Church were guaranteed to enter heaven. Because the characters in this *lai* had sinned by their adulterous relationship, Eliduc and his second wife must enter the monastery to save themselves. The monetary gifts to build Guileluec's convent donated by Eliduc indirectly helped him to enjoy his earthy existence and, according to the theology present in the text, his afterlife also.

Laboratores

Marie includes a feudal discourse into the composition of her *Lais*. This can be observed by the near-exclusion of the *Laboratores* (medieval working class). Even though they represented the majority of the population in the Middle Ages, they were not allowed many privileges and they were forced to remain in their social class. In Marie de France's *Lais*, the worker is represented only on one occasion. The role is very small but it is fundamental to the development of the story's plot. The character of the porter participates in the salvation of the protagonist in *Le Frêne*. This man discovers the infant under an ash tree and he

lui enseignant la règle de son ordre.

(*Eliduc*, lines 1149-1170)

presents her to the abbess; however, he is not a true representative of this social class as he belongs to an urban setting and has more responsibility than a worker in the field.

Popular Culture in Marie's *Lais*

We have just looked at some of the important elements of the *official culture* in Marie de France's text. This next section will focus on aspects of the *popular culture* present in the *Lais*. Marie de France incorporates into her narratives elements dealing with local superstitions such as supernatural worlds, fairies, humans that turn into beasts, and magical potions, for the purpose of attracting her audience. In many cases, these popular superstitions must be integrated into the story because it is their very unnatural presence that allows the human characters to discover love and their loyalties. The supernatural appears in the texts when the hero is excluded from his own society and goes in search of adventure. This quest eventually leads him to a supernatural character that accepts him. This acceptance contrasts with the injustice or rejection that he experiences in the natural world. Transition zones made by nature – forests and water – join the supernatural and the natural world. We have already looked at the importance of the forest earlier in this chapter in relation to unusual events that occur on a knight's adventure. The next natural transition zone that will be discussed is water.

Supernatural Creatures, Transition Zones and Magic Tonics

In Chapter 2, we saw that ocean water, with its salty components, has a direct link with *popular culture*. Berceo uses this element as a setting for his sinner's baptism and purification. Water has similar properties in Marie de France. *Guigemar* features a forest and an ocean as natural transition zones. The forest is where Guigemar encounters the magical white hind that predicts his future and places a curse on him²⁸. The presence of this androgynous creature²⁹ is a direct indication of more supernatural encounters, according to Laurence Harf-Lancner's article "La reine ou la fée: l'itinéraire du héros dans les *Lais* de Marie de France." (92). As predicted by the sighting of the deer, Guigemar is magically transported on a ship without a crew to a foreign land. The ocean and this enchanted vessel are key elements that demonstrate the passage of the natural world to the unknown. Once he arrives at his destination, he falls in love with a *malmariée*, thus completing the white creature's prophecy and curse. The ocean is a border that separates

²⁸ The deer curses Guigemar after he fatally wounds it on his hunting excursion. It decrees that Guigemar will fall in love with a woman and that he will suffer because of his love for her.

²⁹ The deer is described with masculine and feminine traits; it has horns that are only present in males and yet the French word used to describe its sex is "biche", a female deer. The deer is also described with her fawn:

il voit [Guigemar] une biche avec son faon.
La bête était toute blanche
et portait des bois de cerf.

(*Guigemar*, lines 90-92)

Guigemar's two lives: the natural world, where he served a lord, and the supernatural world, where he serves the lady. It is by means of this ocean that Guigemar starts a new life; he finally feels accepted. Even though many women loved him in the natural world, he is able, at last, to share love with the lady of the "supernatural" world; he is no longer excluded from this sentiment. Guigemar was "cleansed" by the salty waters of the ocean, and thus he begins to live. Now that the two transition zones have been discussed, it is important that we analyze the supernatural figures that appear in the *Lais*.

Fairies are just one of the many mystical characters that are present in the text. According to Lecouteux, these figures are not originally from a Norman tradition, but from shared literary elements with Scandinavian traditions. The presence of fairies is attributed to the Celtic traditions of the British. It is therefore assumed that this foreign element was incorporated into the *Lais* for the benefit of Marie's regal patron: Henry II. Lecouteux specifies that fairies are purely a creation of British folklore and this is evident in *Lanval* as the three characters are named after those from British legends: King Arthur, Guinevere, and Lanval (82). The fairy is a combination of human and supernatural traits. She possesses courtly manners, something highly valued by medieval nobility; and she also presents an element of fantasy, as she chooses to leave the supernatural world in order to select a human lover. The fairy in *Lanval* is a very interesting character. Unlike the beasts that

live in the transition zones, she possesses a human likeness by her shape, her manners, wardrobe and her wealth. Even though the female characters are described with superlatives, this creature is portrayed in more detail. The fairy is therefore extremely beautiful and wealthy, she has flawless manners and she dresses with the most luxurious fabrics and colours. The narrator describes the fairy's handmaidens in a similar manner and then compares them to Arthur's wife, Guinevere.

A tant furent celes venues;
devant le rei sunt descendues.
Mult les loèrent li plusur
de cors, de vis e de colur;
n'l ot cele miez ne valsist
qu'unkes la reïne ne fist

(*Lanval*, lines 531-536)³⁰

The handmaidens are more beautiful than the Queen. If the fairy's servants are better looking than Guinevere, their mistress must be even more stunning.

Ja departissent a itant,

³⁰ Les demoiselles sont alors arrivées
et mettent pied à terre devant le roi.
La plupart des assistants louent la beauté de leur corps,
de leur visage et de leur teint:
toutes deux surpassent
de loin la reine

(*Lanval*, lines 531-536)

quant par la vile vint errant
tut a cheval une pucele;
e tut le siecle n'ot si bele.

(*Lanval*, lines 553-556)³¹

Tant granz bealtez ne fu veüe
en Venus, ki esteit reïne
ne en Dido ne en Lavine.
Il n'ot el burc petit ne grant,
ne li veillard ne li enfant,
ki ne l'alassent esgarder,
si cum il la virent errer.
De sa bealté n'est mie gas.

(*Lanval*, lines 584-591)³²

³¹ On allait dons rendre le jugement
quand par la ville on vit s'avancer
une jeune fille à cheval,
la plus belle fille du monde.

(*Lanval*, lines 553-556)

³² On n'avait vu pareille beauté,
ni en Vénus, portant reine de grâce,
ni en Didon, ni en Lavine.
Dans toute la ville, petits et grands,
enfants et vieillards,
tous viennent la contempler
dès qu'ils la voient passer:
je ne plaisante pas en parlant de sa beauté.

(*Lanval*, lines 584-591)

Guinevere is portrayed as an evil and vengeful woman because Lanval will not succumb to her advances. The hero rejects her because he is in love with the fairy, but more importantly, he rejects her out of respect and loyalty to the King. In comparison to Arthur's wife, the fairy is a highly moral creature, and even though she belongs to another world, she exemplifies the manner in which human women should behave.

The other category of supernatural creature in the *Lais* defines itself by the presence of a dual identity. The characters Yonec and Bisclavret are beasts that also assume human forms. Werewolves are supernatural creatures found in Norman and Breton folkloric tradition. It was believed that some humans, once naked, could assume the form of a wolf. Lecouteux mentions that clothes are symbols of the beast's connection with the human world, and that nakedness is a vulnerability that enables him to transform into a supernatural creature.

Les habits seraient-ils porteurs d'un pouvoir magique? Certes, il est juste d'affirmer que se mettre nu revient à se débarrasser de sa nature humaine, mais n'est-ce pas en rester à la surface des choses, à la première strate du complexe? Par contre, si nous admettons que le corps reste sans vie tandis que le Double voyage sous la forme de loup, nous découvrons que les vêtements sont en fait le substitut du corps. Voilà pourquoi il ne faut pas y toucher, voilà pourquoi c'est en les revêtant qu'on redevient homme (135).

The *lai Bisclavret* demonstrates that even though a human assumes the form of a beast, certain characteristics are not lost. The werewolf in this text does not forget his courtly manners of human reason.

Li reis le vit, grant poür a;

ses cumpaignuns tuz apela.
 'Seignur', fet it, 'avant venez
 e ceste merveille esgardez,
 cum ceste beste s'umilie!
 Ele a sen d'ume, merci crie.
 Chaciez mei tuz cez chiens ariere,
 si gardez que hum ne la fiere!
 Ceste beste a entente a sen.
 Espleitiez vus! Alum nus en!
 A la beste durrai ma pes:
 kar jeo ne chaceraï hui mes.'

(*Bisclavret*, lines 149-160)³³

The King was frightened of the beast because he thought it would be violent, but it was very tame. The only moment when the werewolf forgets to restrain his feelings is when he encounters his wife and her new husband. Because of her disloyalty, the beast attacks her in front of the whole court. As he has always been a tame animal, the King realizes

³³ Le roi, effrayé,
 appelle tous ses compagnons:
 «Seigneurs, venez donc
 voir ce prodige,
 voyez comme cette bête se posterne!
 Elle a l'intelligence d'un homme, elle implore ma grâce.
 Faites-moi reculer tous ces chiens
 et que nul ne la touche!
 Cette bête est douée de raison et d'intelligence!
 Dépêchez-vous; allons-nous-en!
 J'accorde ma protection à cette bête
 et j'arrête la chasse pour aujourd'hui!»

(*Bisclavret*, lines 149-160)

that something had occurred to provoke him. Once the wife returns the clothes to the beast, he becomes human again and assumes his rightful place in the Court.

The knight Yonec is the other character who transforms himself, in the lai of the same name. This situation is quite different from that in *Bisclavret*, as the character in this case first assumes the shape of a beast and then of a human. As in many of her narratives, Marie de France presents a *malmariée*. This woman is well guarded by her husband's sister and she is never allowed to exit her chamber, not even to go to Church. Because she is lonely, she summons, in a plea, a man from another world. The creature that comes to rescue her is Muldumarec, a goshawk. He appears to her through her window, the only open space left to the lady. The window is a portal that can carry creatures from one world to another. The goshawk, if we look at Brunetto Latini's description in the *Livre du Trésor*, is a bird of prey (187-191). The nobility used this bird in the sport of falconry and it only seems fitting that this prestigious bird be the vessel for the lady's lover. The importance of Muldumarec's bird shape is to demonstrate that he was a noble character and that he was intelligent. Because her chamber's only opening was a window, his avian form was the best solution for him to reach her. Like the fairy in *Lanval*, Muldumarec is only visible as a man to his lover and she can request his presence whenever she wishes him to see her. He confesses to the lady that he

chose to leave his world because of his love for her (lines 131-138). Unlike Lanval, who departs the human world for the supernatural, Avalon, the lady in Yonec remains prisoner to the natural world because her husband discovers her unfaithfulness. Like the jealous spouse in *Le Rossignol*, he sets up traps to kill the goshawk and thus ruins her chances of joining the supernatural realm.

In Yonec we find a combination of superstitions and religion demonstrating a mixture of *popular* and *official* cultures. Bakhtin states that *popular* and *official* cultures could never mix. The character Muldumarec, when he first appears to the lady in her chamber, echoes the words of the Angel Gabriel in his address to the Virgin Mary: "Dame, n'ayez pas peur"³⁴ (Yonec, line 125). In order not to frighten her by his transformation, he professes his belief in Christ; he utters a revised *Credo* as evidence that he is not an evil apparition.

Jeo crei mult bien al creatur,
ki nus geta de la tristur
u Adam nus mist, nostre pere,
par la mors de la pume amere;
il est e iert e fu tuz jurs

³⁴ This passage is taken from the Revised Standard Version of *The Holy Bible*:

And he [Gabriel] came to her [Mary] and said, "Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God". Luke 1:28-30

vie e lumiere as pecheûrs.
Se vus de ceo ne me creez,
vostre chapelain demandez!
Dites que mals vus a suzprise,
si volez aveir le servise
que Deus a el mund establi,
dunt li pecheûr sunt guari.
La semblance de vus prendrai:
le cors Damedeu recevrai,
ma creence vus dirai tute.

(Yonec, lines 153-167)³⁵

This combination of religious beliefs, the *Credo* and superstition by means of a supernatural creature that changes from beast to human form, clearly shows how Bakhtin's divisions of *popular* and *official*

³⁵ Je crois profondément en notre Créateur,
qui nous a délivrés du malheur
où nous ait plongées notre père Adam
en mordant dans la pomme d'amertume.
Il est, sera et fut toujours
vie et lumière pour les pécheurs.
Si cette profession de foi est insuffisante,
appelez votre chapelain!
Dites que vous vous sentez malade
et que vous voulez recevoir le sacrement
que Dieu a établi dans le monde
pour le salut des pécheurs.
Je vais prendre votre forme,
recevoir le corps de Notre Seigneur
et dire mon Credo.

(Yonec, lines 153-167)

cultures are not as rigid as he indicates; they both coexist in harmony in the *Lais*.

Magic tonics are the last elements of superstition that will be considered in this chapter. Potions appear in two of Marie's narratives: *Le Chèvrefeuille* and *Les Deux Amants*. Even though the Church officially condemned all acts of witchcraft, which element appears very often in medieval literature. The *lai Les Deux Amants* contains the use of a magic potion by the King's daughter to aid her suitor in the challenge set up by her father. She suggests that he visit a relative in Salerno³⁶ who will create a tonic for him to succeed in the challenge.

En Salerne ai une parente,
riche femme est, mult a grant rente.
Plus de trent anz i a esté;
l'art de phisike a tant usé
que mult est saive de mescines.
Tant cunuist herbes e racines,

(*Les Deux Amants*, lines 103-108)³⁷

³⁶Salerno had a school of medicine that was famous during the Middle Ages (Harf-Lancner, 1990: 173).

³⁷ J'ai à Salerne une parente,
une femme influente et fortunée
qui vit là depuis plus de trente ans
et qui a tant pratiqué la médecine
qu'elle connaît tous les remèdes,
toutes les propriétés des plantes et des racines.
(*Les Deux Amants*, lines 103-108)

This tonic, once taken by the suitor is supposed to give him superhuman strength. He should be able to carry his beloved to the summit of the mountain without any difficulties. However, since he does not know the correct dosage, misfortune will follow. The narrator of this *lai* intervenes in the text to foreshadow the tragic events that will occur.

Entre ses braz l'aveit cil prise.
La fiolete od tut sun beivre
(bien set qu'el nel volt pas deceivre)
en sa mein a porter li baille;
mes jo criem que poi ne li vaille,
kar n'ot en lui point de mesure.

(*Les Deux Amants*, lines 184-189)³⁸

A magic herbal tonic is supposed to bring fortune and happiness for those who take it. Unfortunately, in this case it brings death to the knight and his lady; he dies of an overdose and she dies of a broken heart.

The *lai Le Chèvrefeuille* involves the tragic lovers Tristan and Iseut and the use of a magic potion. Because so many stories have been

³⁸ Le jeune homme la prend dans ses bras.
Il a le philtre dans sa petite fiole:
sûr de la loyauté de son amie,
il le lui confie.
Mais je crains que le philtre ne lui serve guère,
car il ne connaît pas la mesure.

(*Les Deux Amants*, lines 184-189)

written about these characters³⁹, Marie de France does not narrate all of the events in their lives. She chooses instead to describe one scene that she believes to be the most pertinent in the separation of the lovers. Marie pre-supposes that the listener is familiar with certain key events in the lives of these characters; for instance, she assumes that her audience already knows about the relationship between Tristan and King Marc – the King married Iseut after his nephew Tristan brought her from a foreign land. She also assumes that the listener is aware that the only reason why her lovers are inseparable is because of the love-potion that was misdirected by the Queen's handmaid, Brangien. Iseut's mother made the tonic for her daughter and the King. Tristan accidentally took the potion intended for Marc, and thus his passion with Iseut began. Their love is compared to a honeysuckle, the *chèvrefeuille*, as it cannot survive without the hazel tree.

D'els dous fu il tut altresì
cume del chievrefueil esteit
ki a la codre se perneit:
quant il s'i est laciez e pris
e tut entur le fust s'est mis,
ensemble poeent bien durer;

³⁹The twelfth century author, Bérout, wrote a detailed account of the Tristan and Iseut legend. There are numerous other versions of this story and therefore it was probably a part of the collective memory by the time Marie de France composed her *Lais*. It is thought that Marie's version, *Le Chèvrefeuille*, was written between 1160 and 1170, and Bérout's text between 1150 and 1190.

mes ki puis les vult desevrer,
la coldre muert hastivement
e li chievrefueilz ensement.

(*Le Chèvrefeuille*, lines 68-76)⁴⁰

Since these two lovers are joined artificially, they are consumed by their sorrow. As in the troubadour poems, this separation is what creates their *joie*. Tristan is able to write about his story in a text that was commissioned by his Queen (*Le Chèvrefeuille*, lines 111-113). So once again, the magic potion is the cause of separation between lovers.

Marie de France's *Lais* is a joining of popular and learned elements. Even though there is very little information about the author, the modern reader can deduce that she was familiar with the works and techniques of classical Antiquity. She was also interested in exposing oral folkloric texts as sources of equal validity to the classical Roman and Greek texts. Rather than writing in the cultured language of the time, Latin, she chose to write in a vernacular language, a similar technique to that used by Gonzalo de Berceo. The integration of popular superstitions and refrains with knowledge and rules from the official culture

⁴⁰ Ils étaient tous deux comme le chèvrefeuille
qui s'enroule autour du noisetier:
quand il s'y est enlacé
et qu'il entoure la tige,
ils peuvent ainsi continuer à vivre longtemps.
Mais si l'on veut séparer,
le noisetier a tôt fait de mourir,
tout comme le chèvrefeuille.

(*Le Chèvrefeuille*, lines 68-76)

demonstrate that these cultures were not as distinct as Bakhtin believes them to be. Marie de France places emphasis on the feudal order and the consequences that occur when someone tampers with this order. The next chapter will expose the similarities and differences found in the texts of Marie de France and Gonzalo de Berceo.

Chapter 4

Comparing *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* and *Lais*

This chapter proposes to look at the similarities and differences found in Gonzalo de Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* and Marie de France's *Lais*. These two authors received a superior level of education and each of them uses this acquired knowledge to produce texts that are representative of their region and the period. As authorities in the texts of Antiquity, both integrate certain learned elements into their narratives, such as verse structures and entertainment techniques. Even though there are obvious learned components that contribute to the compositions of their texts, these two authors also integrate popular refrains and superstitions as devices to keep their listeners entertained. The interaction of the narrator in the opening verses of the texts establishes a relationship between them and their audiences. Some other key similarities can be established by the close relationship between the author and his or her text.

Gonzalo de Berceo and Marie de France mention in their texts, the importance of being vassals of figures that are placed on a higher level in their social and ecclesiastical hierarchies: Berceo serves the Virgin Mary and Marie de France, the King. Mirroring their service to higher and more powerful figures is the relationship between the author and his or her work. By choosing to compose in their vernacular languages and then molding them to a rigid verse structure, Gonzalo de Berceo and Marie de France have left deep imprints on their final product. Following a well-known *topos* in medieval literature, Marie de France states that it is her duty as an author, gifted by God, to write her *Lais*. We have

observed in the other chapters of this study how both of these authors write their texts to keep local folklore and learned tales from being lost and also so that they will fit into a new cultural context. Berceo mentions on several occasions that his *Milagros* were written for the glory of the Virgin. It is his sincere hope that others may learn about Her grace through his narrative texts. Marie de France indicates that she wants to compose her *Lais* so that future generations will also benefit from learning and *glossing* texts from their ancestral history. By including their names in their texts¹, Berceo and Marie de France have also solidified reception of favour and protection from their patrons, as well as their key to immortality.

Among the differences present in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* and the *Lais*, are the obvious divisions between *Oratores* and *Bellatores*. As an example of a religious text, most of the narratives in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* are about the clergy. Berceo's text, like all religious texts, was meant to instruct an urban population and also members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. They contain examples of how to serve the Virgin Mary and of the rewards She will bestow upon her faithful servants. This *exemplum*² element is what differentiates the *Milagros de*

¹ Most medieval texts were written anonymously, however, Ernst R. Curtius in his book *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, mentions that there were specific reasons as to why some authors choose to include their names in their texts. Curtius' reasons will be looked at in greater detail later in this chapter.

² Jacques Le Goff gives an excellent definition of the *exemplum* genre in his book *Your Money or Your Life: Economy and Religion in the Middle Ages*:

Nuestra Señora from the *Lais*. Berceo also includes representations of the other levels of the tripartite order in his text. After his inclusion of the *Oratores*, he shifts his attention to the marginal classes: thieves and the Jewish community. Marie de France writes exclusively about the *Bellatores* social class to which she is believed to belong, even though there are some examples of *Oratores* and *Laboratores*. She clearly outlines the social problems present in her own level of society: the preservation of the feudal hierarchy and the roles of women. Even though women were not viewed as an independent group in society, her female characters obviously belonged to the noble class. There is no indication in the *Lais* of an important female character being from a disadvantaged class.

Marie's stories were written to entertain and educate the royal court. Her narratives are about the adventures of knights and their encounters with supernatural beings such as fairies, characters that assume the shape of humans or beasts (*Yonec* and *Bisclavret*). Marie's stories sometimes present hard lines to demonstrate the consequences of disruptions to the feudal order (*Equitan* and *Bisclavret*). Berceo's *Milagros* were written essentially for the religious instruction of his parish and the pilgrims traveling to Santiago de Compostela. However,

An exemplum is a brief narrative, presented as true and intended for use in a speech, generally a sermon, in order to convince an audience by means of a salutary lesson. The story is brief, easy to remember, and convincing. It uses rhetoric and narrative effects, and it seizes the imagination. Amusing or, more often, terrifying, it dramatizes. The preacher is offering a little talisman that, if one is willing to grasp its message and make use of it, should bring salvation. He is offering the key to Heaven (13).

he is considered by some critics to be a *juglar*³. We can therefore argue that he could take the role as an entertainer for an urban audience.

The Importance of Literacy

Education was not accessible to every level of society and in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it was still synonymous with the upper-classes of both the ecclesiastical and noble hierarchies. Marie de France and Gonzalo de Berceo are familiar with the written sources of Antiquity and each of them makes certain to include this information in his or her text. Berceo uses this knowledge to loosely translate Latin sources of the *Milagros*' stories in order to create his own detailed versions. His texts demonstrate a vast understanding of learned material as he remarks the different sources he has used in his compilation. As is the case in the Middle Ages, most of the written religious texts were in Latin because this was a learned language and was easily understood by all members of the clergy. In choosing to write in vernacular, and thus demonstrating his refusal to continue in the monastic tradition, Berceo is able to establish a more honest relationship with his public. As his audience is

³Garrosa-Resina states in his book *Magia y superstición en la literatura castellana medieval*, that Berceo was:

...además de clérigo y poeta esencialmente religioso, es también – no lo olvidemos – un juglar. Juglar de Santa María si se quiere, pero juglar al fin. Conviviendo con toda la <<hermosura>> del Mester de Clerecía, ahí están en la poesía de Berceo los elementos juglarescos: sus continuas apelaciones al público – más oyente que lector –, el hacerse presente él mismo en el poema, sus llamadas de atención y de petición de disculpas para no agotar la paciencia de quienes le escuchan, sus protestas de no ser tan letrado como para <<fer verso latino>> y el <<vaso de bon vino>> que pide como recompensa. Todo esto nos demuestra que, como dirigida al pueblo, la poesía de Berceo tiene también un marcado carácter popular y, por ende, ha de tener cabida en ella el modo de pensar y actuar del pueblo (97-98).

unable to understand Latin, he presents the text in a language that is more accessible to them. Marie de France does not take her *Lais* from Latin sources but she mentions having knowledge of Priscian, an early medieval grammarian, in her *Prologue* (line 10). She also acknowledges her consultation of a written source in the *lai Le Chèvrefeuille*.

Asez me plest e bien le vueil
del lai qu'um nume Chievrefeuil
que la verité vus en cunt
coment fu fez, de quei e dunt.
Plusur le m'unt cunté e dit
e jeo l'ai trové en escrit
de Tristam e de la reïne,
de lur amur ki tant fu fine,
dunt il ourent meinte dolur;
puis en mururent en un jur.

(*Le Chèvrefeuille*, lines 1-10)⁴

Like Berceo, Marie also wants to establish a contact with her audience and so she chooses to write in a vernacular language therefore making

⁴ J'ai bien envie de vous raconter
la véritable histoire
du lai qu'on appelle *Le chèvrefeuille*
et de vous dire comment il fut composé et quelle fut son origine.
*On m'a souvent relaté*⁴
l'histoire de Tristan et de la reine,
et je l'ai aussi trouvé dans un livre,
l'histoire de leur amour si parfait,
qui leur valut tant de souffrances
puis les fit mourir le même jour.

(*Le Chèvrefeuille*, lines 1-10)

her stories less intimidating and more approachable to those who hear them.

Illiteracy was a dividing factor among social classes; this is why the clergy imposed some clear guidelines for their members. Since most of the high ranking members of the *Oratores* class were from a privileged level in worldly society, they were better educated than, for example, a friar born to underprivileged parents. As this partition was being created among the clergy, the Church began to implement a structure of education that was equally accessible to all levels within the church hierarchy. Giovanni Miccoli describes the rules regarding literacy in “Monks” in *Medieval Callings*.

Still, the fact that the rules generally provided that all monks had to learn to read – at least all of those under the age of fifty, as the *Regula magistri* specifies, thus attesting that a number of adult illiterates also chose the monastic life – placed monks on a level of instruction above that of the common herd. There was, in fact, a strict connection between the ability to read and the religious life of the monk, as rules in the Western tradition generally set aside from two to three hours daily for spiritual reading, and reading was the necessary preliminary to *meditatio*, the oral repetition of biblical texts committed to memory. This meant that the monastery needed to have the means – a library, a school, a scriptorium– that quite naturally made it an exclusive and culturally privileged place (43).

To demonstrate that Berceo was aware of the current problems within his society, he describes this situation in milagro IX, “El Clérigo Simple”. Berceo indicates how a humble cleric was only able to celebrate one mass because of his poor level of education.

Era un simple clérigo,	pobre de clerecía
dicié cutiano missa	de la Sancta María;
non sabié decir otra,	deciéla cada día,
más la sabié por uso	que por sabiduría.

(Stanza 220)⁵

As in all of the narratives of *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, Berceo does not criticize his protagonists in a severe manner. Instead, in this milagro, he criticizes the actions and words of the Bishop. Berceo is more compassionate with the cleric because he celebrated mass with a pure heart, and for his devoted service to the Virgin Mary. In fact, in this particular case, Berceo comments implicitly about the ecclesiastical institution for not educating their priests better. He puts the criticism in the words of the Virgin as the Bishop was going to take away her loyal cleric because he was not schooled enough. Her comments are not kind, she threatens the Bishop with divine retaliation if the cleric is not reinstated to his former position. As this story appears in a collection of *exempla*, Berceo presents the reality of the ecclesiastical education of his time and the snobbery within the clergy regarding this important and exclusive subject.

Marie de France offers another view on the importance of literacy in the opening verses of her *Prologue*. There is a hint of arrogance in the tone of the author regarding her ability to read and to interpret the texts of Antiquity and of the local folklore.

Qui Deus a duné esciēnce

5 There was a simple cleric of little learning;
daily he said Holy Mary's mass;
he did not know how to say any other, he said it each day;
knew it more by habit than through understanding.
(Stanza 220)

e de parler bone eloquence,
ne s'en deit taisir ne celer,
ainz se deit voluntiers mustrer.

(*Prologue*, lines 1-4)⁶

Marie feels that she has been selected by God, the only true authority, to fulfill the task of setting these folkloric tales to a poetic narrative style. Her first four verses stress that she cannot ignore this divine gift because very few people are blessed in this manner. Marie's comment in these opening verses demonstrates the social snobbery associated with the exclusivity of literacy.

The Inclusion of a Name in a Text

Both Berceo and Marie de France name themselves in their narratives, and they address their patrons early in the texts. Ernst R. Curtius mentions in his book *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, that the medieval tradition of addressing a patron and also including the author's name in the same text, derives from a classical tradition. He states how Heiric of Auxerre wrote about the life of Saint Germanus in his *Allocutio ad librum*. Auxerre dedicates his text to the Saint, his patron, and then he mentions his own name. This combination, according to Curtius, was thought to protect the author

⁶ Quand Dieu vous a donné la science
et un talent de conteur,
il ne faut pas se taire ni se cacher
mais se montrer sans hésitation.

(*Prologue*, lines 1-4)

from others who were jealous of the composer's talent (516). The two patrons of our authors in question are powerful members of their respective social classes: Berceo's patron, the Virgin Mary, is a beatific character who intercedes on behalf of the sinner to Christ, and Marie de France's King, the highest figure on the social hierarchy. Like the relationship between the knight and his lord in the dubbing ceremony, Berceo appeals to his superior, and offers Her his loyalty.

Quiero en estos árbores	un ratiello sobir
e de los sos miraclos	algunos escribir;
la Gloriosa me guíe	que lo pueda cumplir,
ca yo non me trevía	en ello a venir.

Terrêlo por miláculo	que lo faz la Gloriosa
Si guiarme quisiere	a mí en esta cosa;
Madre, plena de gracia,	reína poderosa,
Tú me guía en ello,	ca eres piadosa.

("Introducción", Stanzas 45-46)⁷

This declaration of loyalty is sealed with a gift, his collection of narrative exempla. This image of Berceo donating his collection to the Virgin's glory is also a mirror image of one of his characters in *Milagro I*, "La

7 I want to climb up into those trees for a little while
and write about some of Her miracles.
May the Glorious One guide me so that I may complete the task
or I would not dare to undertake it otherwise.

I will take it as a miracle wrought by the Glorious One
if She should deign to guide me in this task:
Mother Full of Grace, Powerful Queen,
guide me in it, for You are merciful.

Casulla de San Ildefonso". Ildefonsus, like Berceo, dedicates to Mary an entire book praising her perpetual virginity. The Virgin rewards him for his gift with a chasuble.

As seen earlier, the Virgin has been considered by many artists as a patron and as an inspiration. Berceo has employed certain techniques that are present in courtly romances to demonstrate his relationship with Her. He wants Her to accept his offering on behalf of his soul.

Madre del tu Gonzalvo seï remembrador
que de los tos miraclos fue *enterpretador*;
tú fes por él, Sennora, prezes al Criador,
ca el tu privilegio vale a *peccador*,
tú li gana la gracia de Dios, Nuestro Sennor. (Amen.)

(Milagro XXV, Stanza 911)⁸.

So like the poets and writers of secular texts, Berceo dedicates his narratives as a gift to Mary in hope that She will return the favour and grant him eternal peace once he is dead.

The *Lais* are a combination of learned and popular elements that are structured in such a way that they appeal to the higher levels of society. As it has been observed, the work is dedicated to a King and Marie must therefore take into consideration certain aspects that would permit her to present humbly these texts to her monarch. Marie makes a plea for him to accept her compilation.

8 Mother, be mindful of Your Gonzalo
who was the versifier of all Your miracles.
Pray for him, Lady, to the Creator,
Since Your privilege helps the sinner.
Win for him the grace of God, Our Lord. (Amen).
(Miracle XXV, Stanza 911).

En l'onur de vus, nobles reis,
ki tant estes pruz e curteis,
a qui tute joie s'encline,
e en qui quer tuz biens racine,
m'entremis des lais assembler,
par rime faire e raconter.
En mun quer persoe e diseie,
sire, ques vos presentereie.
Se vos les plaist a receveir,
mult me ferez grant joie aveir;
a tuz jurs mais en serrai liee.
Ne me tenez a surquidiee,
se vos os faire icest present.

*(Prologue, lines 43-55)*⁹

⁹ En votre honneur, noble roi,
vous qui êtes si preux et courtois,
vous qui salue toute joie,
vous dont le coeur donne naissance à toutes les vertus,
j'ai entrepris de rassembler ces lais
et de les raconter en vers, sire,
avec le désir
de vous les offrir.
S'il vous plaît de les accepter,
vous me remplirez de joie
à tout jamais.
Ne me jugez donc pas
si j'ose vous faire ce présent.

(Prologue, lines 43-55)

If we observe Marie de France's dedication, besides mentioning the King and later herself, she also mentions jealous people who might attempt to destroy her text.

Ki de bone matire traite,
mult li peise, se bien n'est faite.
Oëz, seignur, que dit Marie,
ki en sun tens pas ne s'oblie.
Celui deivent la genz loër,
ki en bien fait de sei parler.
Mais quant il a en un païs
hume ne femme de grant pris,
cil ki de sun bien unt envie
sovent en diënt vileinie.
Sun pris li vuelent abaissier:
pur ceo comencent le mestier
del malvais chien coart, felun,
ki mort la gent par traïsun.
Nel vueil mie pur ceo laissier,
se jangleür u losengier
le me vuelent a mal turner;
ceo est lut dreiz de mesparler.

(*Guigemar*, lines. 1-18)¹⁰

¹⁰ I have italicized certain verses in this passage (the translation) to demonstrate the relationship between Marie de France, her king, and her foes. This passage clearly demonstrates an ancient tradition discussed by Ernst R. Curtius, and how it can be applied to Marie's text.

Quand la matièrere est riche,
l'auteur est désolé de ne pas lui rendre justice.
Ecoutez donc, seigneurs, les récits de *Marie*,

Marie appears as a humble servant to the King in this passage as she makes a reference to him in lines 5 and 6. She then continues to mention her foes, as is customary in the texts of Antiquity according to Ernst R. Curtius. Marie has applied this ancient formula to her text as seen in lines 15-18. Here, Marie completely relies on her patron's protection from the jealousy of her foes and she reminds them about him in line 18. Because the *Lais* were dedicated to someone powerful, the jealous people would not dare to sabotage her text or her reputation for fear that the King might retaliate.

Early in the *Prologue* of the *Lais*, the author states that she does not want these folkloric tales to be forgotten by the general population. As one of the first female authors of the Middle Ages, Marie has brought attention to many important issues of her time: the feudal order, the ill treatment of women by their husbands, and the loyalty agreements. By dedicating her text to a monarch, her lord, she has demonstrated her vassalage to her patron in front of the rest of the court. Strangely

Qui tient sa place parmi les auteurs de son temps.
On doit faire l'éloge
de celui qui a une bonne réputation.
Pourtant quand un pays possède
un homme ou une femme de grand mérite,
les envieux
se répandent en calomnies
pour diminuer sa gloire:
ils se mettent à jouer le rôle
du chien méchant, lâche et perfide,
qui mord traîtreusement les gens.
Malgré tout je ne renoncerai pas,
même si les railleurs et les médisants
veulent dénigrer mon entreprise:
libre à eux de dire du mal!

(Guigemar, lines. 1-18)

enough, this image of a humble servant is contrasted dramatically with the opening verses of her *Prologue*, where she states that educated people thus including herself, are gifted by God in the art of telling stories. She then proceeds to declare her involvement in the composition of the *Lais*. Marie is very subtle in her wording, and while she praises her ancestors and mentors, she includes herself in their company, so even though Marie de France demonstrates vassalage to her King with the *Lais*, she composes these texts because it is her responsibility to exploit her talent.

Berceo and Marie de France: Witnesses of their Region and Century

Berceo and Marie de France are mouthpieces of their times. Details of everyday life in their century and region appear in their texts. Berceo describes the weaknesses of the Clergy, their political roles, and the educational aspects of his region; he also manages to describe in a very familiar manner life in an urban society. As observed in previous chapters, Berceo was a secular priest from the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla and therefore he had certain liberties that other members of his cloister did not share. Judging from his descriptions of daily life in his *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, Berceo is aware of the decline of the tripartite order. He demonstrates the importance of other social groups by including them in examples from his text.

Enna cibdat que es	de Costantín nomnada,
ca Costantín la ovo	otro tiempo poblada,
el dio a Sant Peidro	Roma pora posada,
avié y un bon omne	de fazienda granada.

Era esti burgês	de muy grand corazón,
por sobir en grand precio	fazié grand missiõn;
espendié sos averes,	dávalos en baldón,
quiquier que li pidiesse	él non dizrié de non.

(Milagro XXIII, Stanzas 626-627)¹¹

In earlier centuries, Christians regarded commerce as something evil because it involved the trade of material goods for the money of other Christians. The clergy did not support the merchants, in fact, many times they openly declared their disapproval; such is the case of Thomas Aquinas, as Gurevich noted, "There is something disgraceful about trade, something sordid and shameful" (247). They were even more opposed to moneylenders who increased their wealth using a gift from God – that of time. As the merchant class became more numerous and powerful, the once-criticized group was now able to contribute large sums of money to the Church, thus provoking the clergy to accept them with a new

11 In the city that is named for Constantine,
since Constantine founded it in earlier times,
he who gave Rome to Saint Peter as a home,
there was a good man of great estate.

This burgher had a very good heart,
in order to increase his fame, he made great expenditures;
he spent his fortune, he gave it freely,
no matter who asked him, he would never say no.

(Miracle XXIII, Stanzas 626-627)

enthusiasm. The Church was opposed to earning money easily; merchants who had to leave on long and dangerous journeys for their products were regarded in a better light. It is perhaps for this reason that Berceo treats his merchant in a positive manner. The depiction of the merchant in Berceo's compilation displays a great change in the Church's attitude toward the traders from a few centuries earlier. His character is not greedy and he gives away all of his wealth to those less fortunate than himself. The change in the Church's new attitude to merchants also demonstrates to the modern reader the decline of the tripartite order and the rise of the other social classes.

As a mouthpiece for the clergy during the thirteenth century, Berceo also articulates an intense dislike for the Jewish community as he showers it with negative descriptions and insulting comments. Berceo lived in the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla, a place that was in the heart of the pilgrim trail to Santiago de Compostela. Berceo's instruction came from the French monastic order of Cluny, and a great intolerance for religions that were not Roman Christian was instilled in him. Joël Saugnieux suggests that because the Iberian Peninsula was a region of three different religions, the degree of anti-Semitism was not nearly as high as in other European nations.

El siglo XIII se puede considerar como un siglo de transición para los judíos españoles. En los numerosos *Fueros* conservados, y sobre todo en las *Siete Partidas*, documentos de valor excepcional, vemos que las medidas de protección alternan con decisiones de matiz antisemítico. Alfonso El Sabio protege personalmente a los judíos, les acoge en su Corte, donde forman parte de la escuela de traducción de Toledo; les entrega varias mezquitas para que las conviertan en sinagogas. Hasta obliga a los hebreos a guardar sus propias leyes religiosas, penando con multa a quien no respete el sábado; impide las conversiones al Islam y dificulta que se produzcan al cristianismo (el converso tenía que dejar todos sus bienes al erario) (78).

Even the King, Alfonso X El Sabio, did not openly express negative sentiments toward the Jewish community but rather encouraged it to actively participate in the translation schools of Toledo and he invited Jewish people to become part of his Court. According to Saugnieux, the anti-Semitic opinion that was common in other European states labeled the Jewish community as evil and responsible for leading the Christian soul astray.

En España, los cristianos se habían mostrado siempre más tolerantes y se puede suponer que el cambio de actitud fuera una de las consecuencias de la influencia francesa. A partir del siglo XIII la Iglesia hizo cuanto pudo para acabar con la convivencia, quizá porque los monjes de Cluny, cuya influencia era enorme en la península, y sus caballeros franceses que participaron en la Cruzada contra los moros se extrañaron de la tolerancia de los españoles y les convirtieron, por decirlo así, a la intolerancia (78-79).

As can be seen from the Jewish character described by Berceo in his *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, the Jewish community was believed to be guilty of practicing witchcraft, lending money, being vassals of Satan, and also of refusing to accept Christian rituals. It is obvious from Berceo's descriptions that this manner of thinking was accepted by his audience members, otherwise they would not figure in his collection of milagros.

Another interesting element in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* that provides the modern reader with a glimpse of the life around the Rioja region during the thirteenth century is the relationship between the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla with the foreign pilgrims travelling to Santiago de Compostela. Berceo has managed to find a direct link with many of his audience members by using several different foreign settings for his milagro stories. His *Introducción* involves the allegory of the Christian being on a kind of pilgrimage on earth, the spiritual roads

that he or she must travel are difficult but all Christians have a common goal. They all want to reach Heaven. Returning to this theme, many of Berceo's narratives involve a protagonist who goes on a pilgrimage or who travels to a distant land; there are many dangers along the way, but ultimately the character is enlightened in some holy manner (the Virgin Mary or one of the saints saves the pilgrim from eternal damnation). Since many of the pilgrims passing through San Millán would have already been travelling for many months to reach their final destination, Santiago de Compostela, they would have been able to relate to these narratives.

Very few of the milagro stories take place in the Iberian Peninsula. Other regions that are mentioned for the settings of the twenty-five narratives are France, Germany, Italy, Turkey and the Holy Land. Some of these texts take place in an unknown location so that they may be relevant to all those who would hear them. The most famous pilgrimages that are mentioned in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* are locations where miracles have occurred while the protagonist is en route to the jubilee: Vera Cruz in Jerusalem, Mont St. Michel in France and of course Santiago de Compostela. As miracles and pilgrimages go hand in hand, many of the devoted foreign listeners passing through San Millán de la Cogolla would be able to relate to the events narrated by Berceo in his *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*.

Marie de France's audience is from a higher social level than Berceo's. Her characters are all nobles, and there are very few characters from a lower social class and from the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Marie de France gives the modern reader a view of the traditions of the powerful noble class as well as the relationships in this

group. As a keen observer of worldly society, Marie writes about the conditions of women in high levels of society. She especially comments on women as casualties, either of their fathers or husbands. Marie de France does not always portray her female characters as victims, she clearly demonstrates in two of her narratives that women can also be devious and cunning (*Bisclavret* and *Equitan*).

There are certain rules that Marie's characters must follow, even if their superior or someone close to them has betrayed them. The best example lies in the relationship of a knight and his lord. This bond is supposed to be very stable, and the key elements that cement this pact are trust and loyalty. The same can be said about the relationships between men and women. As we have seen in the *lai Eliduc*, Guideluec is betrayed by her husband because he has fallen in love with another woman. She is then "free" to search for another lord; in this case she must choose God because divorces were forbidden by the Church.

Journeys to Redemption

Milagros de Nuestra Señora and the *Lais* share another similarity in the development of their characters: they must undergo some kind of quest or unplanned event in order to be vindicated. The first purpose of the *Milagros* is to educate the medieval public about the goodness of the Virgin Mary and the possibility of redemption from any kind of sin. All of the characters in this collection are sinners and they have to atone for their sins before they are completely forgiven by the Virgin. The protagonists of *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* must go through a spiritual journey before they reach Heaven. Most of the characters die before they are able to reconcile with the Virgin Mary and Christ, and so their soul

travels to Purgatory, a place where the devils and a beatific figure fight over the ownership of the sinner. Once the Virgin intervenes on behalf of her servant, the devils flee and She can decide what the human's punishment should be. In most cases, the sinner is resuscitated and he or she has to do penance before being received into Heaven. In some of the *milagros*, sinners discover their sin before death so they are able to repent and do penance to gain the favour of the Virgin.

The central theme of the *Milagros* is the eventual forgiveness of the sinner by the Virgin Mary. The characters of the *Lais* go through a journey which usually involves travelling long distances and the hero is usually forced to leave his land because of a misunderstanding with his lord. The journey leads him to another lord, lady, or a supernatural encounter. The people whom he encounters fulfill his need of acceptance, and if he ever returns to his old surroundings, he realizes that he is an outsider because he feels more at ease with the other world; he does not want to resume his old relationships there; he wants to be where he feels accepted.

Redemption of characters take place in the *Lais* and in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. For some of the protagonists in Marie de France's text, when they are wronged by someone else, usually somebody of a higher position on the feudal hierarchy, they are reconciled at the end of the *lai*. For instance, Lanval is snubbed by the King at the beginning of the text and after he is cleared of Guinevere's accusation, he is accepted by the monarch once again. In the case of the *Milagros*, the redemption of a character is much easier to visualize, as there is usually some kind of beatific intervention on his or her behalf. The character, as the narrator usually points out in the first three stanzas of the text, must be forgiven

for whatever sins he or she commits throughout the narrative. This occurs because they are either devoted to the Virgin Mary or because they have links to a monastery or to a cult of saints.

Popular Images

Gonzalo de Berceo writes about religious subjects but there are many popular images present in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. One of these popular elements can be seen in his representation of angels and devils. These two types of creatures as we examined in the references to Bakhtin's *Rabelais*, represent different images from the ones we visualize in our age. Devils were represented as comical figures that would flee at the presence or the utterance of the name of the Virgin Mary. They are described in amusing situations by Berceo, such as the episode when they are playing kick-ball with the soul of the sinner (Milagro II, Stanza 86). The devils speak in the vernacular language and they use comical expressions. As already observed in Bakhtin's descriptions, townspeople would dress up as devils during the carnival in order to add another element of amusement to the festivity (266). Devils represented all forms of "divertissement" present during carnival, especially at banquets and at comical events in the town square. Angels and other beatific figures are not necessarily associated with human forms of amusement. Berceo portrays his angels and saints as wise characters; however, in most cases they are not strong enough to deter the devils without the help of the Virgin Mary. Angels appear in the narrative to escort the sinner to Heaven after the completion of his or her penance. Berceo does not permit his angel characters to speak, probably because they are lower ranking beatific figures. Their silence demonstrates wisdom as opposed

to the devils who speak silly utterances. On two occasions saints are permitted to speak; this demonstrates that they are more in touch with human concerns because they were also once human. To show the power of higher-ranking beatific figures, saints lose their ability to speak once Christ or the Virgin gets involved. The narrator summarizes the saint's words and then turns the speech over to the Virgin or Christ. Mary is the most accessible beatific figure to humans because She speaks to sinners, and protects them from the devils and other humans who wish to do harm. With the exception of the Virgin, all other beatific figures are given a serious and inaccessible portrayal by Berceo.

Even though the devils are described in a comical manner in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, Satan is not depicted in such an amusing way (milagro XXV). The characterization is probably made because the "Milagro de Teófilo" is from an Eastern source. The Devil in this milagro is described in a more sinister light than all the other devils in the collection. Even though he is deceptive like all the others, he appears in the narrative surrounded by symbols of the occult. He is led to his meeting with Theophilus by a procession of ugly and dark figures holding large lit candles. Images such as these are similar to what the modern reader associates with Hell and the Devil. The element of fear returns in the scene as Theophilus discusses and signs the treaty with Satan. The two popular side effects of this signed agreement are the loss of his shadow and his colouring. All of these events are not meant to make Berceo's audience laugh, but rather they are there to instill fear and to prompt them to contemplate their lives and their behaviour.

The characters that are representative of the popular culture in Marie de France's time are fairies, human-like animals, and shape-

changing characters (Bisclavret and Yonec). In the previous chapter we saw how these characters interact with humans by means of transition zones. There are already certain superstitions about places like forests or open water and therefore Marie de France takes advantage of this collective memory to introduce supernatural characters. These characters are described in a positive manner and are not meant to frighten the audience or her human characters. Even the werewolf, who is generally associated with danger and violence, is described as wise, rational, and loyal. The cases of *Yonec* and *Bisclavret* suggest to the audience that dual-form creatures do not pose a danger. Bisclavret and Yonec are familiar with the manners of the Court and they can easily blend into feudal society. These characters are examples of superstitions that are assimilated into Marie's *Lais* and link her time period with that of her ancestors.

Mult ai oï sovent cunter
que l'em suleit jadis trover
aventures en cest païs,
ki rehaitouent les pensis.
Chevalier trovoënt puceles
a lur talent, gentes e beles,
e dames truvoënt amanz
beals e curteis, pruz e vaillanz,
si que blasmees n'en esteint
ne nul fors eles nes veeient.

(*Yonec*, lines 95-104)¹²

¹² J'ai souvent entendu conter
que jadis dans ce pays

The lady is aware of oral folkloric texts that tell about meetings with the supernatural. The knight, Yonec, appears to her in answer to her request for a friend. Like the fairy in *Lanval*, Yonec only appears to his beloved. He was finally able to leave his land and fly to her side because she summoned him by her plea.

Jeo vus ai lungement amee
e en mun quer mult desiree;
unkes femmes fors vus n'amai
ne ja mes altre n'ameraï.
Mes ne poeie a vus venir
ne fors de mun païs eissir,
se vus ne m'eüssiez requis.

(Yonec, lines 131-137)¹³

des aventures merveilleuses
rendaient la joie aux malheureux!
Les chevaliers trouvaient les femmes
de leurs rêves, nobles et belles,
et les dames trouvaient des amants,
beaux et courtois, preux et vaillants,
sans encourir le moindre blâme,
car elles étaient les seules à les voir.

(Yonec, lines 95-104)

¹³ Je [Yonec] vous aime
et vous désire depuis bien longtemos;
je n'ai jamais aimé d'autre femme
et n'en aimerai jamais d'autre que vous.
Mais je ne pouvais pas vous rejoindre
ni sortir de mon pays
si vous ne m'appeliez d'abord.

(Yonec, lines 131-137)

The well-spoken Yonec is able to make the lady forget all about the laws of nature because of his eloquence and because he removes her loneliness.

The fairy in *Lanval* is another character with roots in popular culture. This character appears to Lanval when he was excluded by the King in the distribution of gifts. While Lanval is resting by a stream, two handmaidens of the fairy appear to him and conduct him to their mistress. Because Lanval was away from his city and close to nature, supernatural events can occur. The fairy greets her chosen human lover in the valley and explains how she has traveled a great distance to reach him.

'Lanval', fet ele, 'bels amis.
pur vus vinc jeo fors de ma terre;
de luinz vus sui venue querre.

(*Lanval*, lines 110-112)¹⁴

Lanval accepts the fairy's declaration of love and he pledges his loyalty to her. He even promises to leave the natural world to be with her forever.

Jeo ferai voz comandemenz;
pur vus guerpirai tutes genz.
Ja mes ne quier de vus partir;
ceo est la riens que plus desir.'

(*Lanval*, lines 127-130)¹⁵

¹⁴ 'Lanval, mon ami,
c'est por vous que j'ai quitté ma terre,
je suis venue de loin pour vous chercher.
(*Lanval*, lines 110-112)

¹⁵ J'obéirai à vos ordres,

Since Lanval has been snubbed by the King, he is no longer under obligation to their loyalty agreement, and therefore he is free to return with the fairy to her land right away. As we now know, Lanval does not join his beloved because he still felt some loyalty to his lord. After he is cleared of attacking the Queen, he leaves the natural world for Avalon, the land of the fairies (lines 659-662). By mentioning this land in her closing lines, Marie assumes that her audience had some previous knowledge of the fairy tradition. Avalon is an enchanted island (line 661). In general, islands are completely isolated from the rest of the arthurian world which accounts for the fairy having to travel such a long distance to meet with Lanval. In order to reach an island the traveler must board a vessel and be guided by the water, itself a natural transition zone where unusual events can occur. This supernatural element along with the presence of a fairy show the folkloric elements of Britain in the twelfth century.

The last supernatural creature in Marie de France's *Lais* is the talking deer in *Guigemar*. The title character has an encounter with the doe in a forest while hunting. Marie's description of this animal is very interesting because there is no clear evidence as to its sex.

En l'espeisse d'un grant buissun

vit une bisse od sun foïn.

Tute fu blanche cele beste;

j'abandonnerai tout le monde pour vous,
je ne veux plus jamais vous quitter
et ne désire plus rien au monde que votre présence!
(*Lanval*, lines 127-130)

perches de cerf out en la teste.

(*Guigemar*, lines 89-92)¹⁶

The doe possesses antlers, a physical trait belonging to the male deer. The unusual creature also appears with its fawn, a typical characteristic of female deer. The hind is white and June Hall McCash explains the importance of this colour.

The white hind is frequently associated with a fairy mistress or an otherworld adventure, but here, as Joan Brumlik has pointed out, Marie uses thematic irony by sending Guigemar on an adventure where he finds, not a fairy mistress, but a *mal mariée* (201).

Hall McCash cites Brumlik to point out that Guigemar does not encounter a fairy, but rather an unhappily married woman. The circumstances in which Guigemar finds this woman are very unusual: the magic vessel guides him to the island where she resides. Because there is a voyage over one of the transition zones and he arrives at an island, we can assume that Guigemar's lady is magical in some way.

Transition Zones in *Milagros De Nuestra Señora*

In Chapter 3 we discussed the different types of transition zones present in Marie de France's *Lais*. Are there any transition zones in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*? Marie de France's narratives involve the physical world (Earth), the supernatural world (where fairies and other

¹⁶ Alors, au plus profond d'un épais buisson,
il voit une biche avec son faon.
La bête était toute blanche
et portait des bois de cerf.

(*Guigemar*, lines 89-92)

fabled beasts live), and the forest or water (the portal to the supernatural world on Earth). Humans can enter the supernatural world by meeting a fabled character at one of these portals; such is the case with Guigemar and Lanval. Berceo has similar zones in *Milagros*: the physical world (Earth), the beatific world (Heaven), the sinister world (Hell), and transition zones (pilgrim trails, crossroads, water, death (Purgatory), and visions). The sinner encounters the beatific and the sinister in one or more of these transition zones. As Geremek stated in "The Marginal Man", once individuals left the safety of their town, they were exposed to all kinds of dangers on the road (348-349). It is precisely on the trails leading to Santiago de Compostela that the Devil disguises himself as the Apostle James to achieve his evil plans (milagro VIII). The Devil convinces St. Hugh, the Abbot of Cluny, to kill himself as penance for fornication. As the devils are taking away the soul of the sinner in the transition zone of death (Purgatory), the real Apostle appears to free St. Hugh (Stanza 198). This milagro demonstrates the interaction of two different transition zones in the salvation of this protagonist. The first zone is the trail where the character encounters the Devil and where he kills himself, the second zone is death, where a beatific figure disputes jurisdiction over the soul with other devils.

We have also seen the importance of roads in other milagros. It is at a crossroads in Milagro XXV that Theophilus has his sinister encounter with the devil. Crossroads were usually on the outskirts of a town and they were traditionally believed to be a place where the supernatural and the human world would meet. They were also places where it was believed that witches practiced their craft.

«Las encrucijadas – escribe Dutton en la nota sobre el verso 147a, también referida al 733 Berceo que ahora nos ocupa – se han considerado siempre de mal agüero y siniestras. Desde la prehistoria se situaban ahí las horcas y las brujas recogían las hierbas que se necesitaban para sus recetas . . . es posible que la fama de la encrucijada derive de los intentos fallidos de cultivar estos claros»¹⁷. Se refiere Dutton a que los caminos eran incultivables y por ello se destinaban a este menester. Con mayor motivo la encrucijada – cruce de dos caminos – es totalmente improductiva y por tanto, según la creencia popular, se considera terreno fatídico (Garrosa-Resina, 122).

As Garrosa-Resina explains, crossroads have long been associated with superstition and death sentences. Berceo also situates another one of his milagros, milagro VI “El ladrón devoto”, at a crossroads. Here the protagonist does not experience an encounter with witches; as a criminal, he is instead sentenced to hang. We are told that he was a loyal servant of the Virgin Mary and because of this the Virgin’s hands lift him so that he may not choke on the noose (Stanzas 147-149). Crossroads were very seldom places where divine interventions took place and they appear throughout literature, as Garrosa-Resina explains, as occult meeting places. We can therefore conclude that in Berceo’s *Milagros*, crossroads are a transition zone for devils, as well as for the Virgin Mary.

Another transition zone found in both the *Lais* and *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* is water. Berceo associates the events with water, the most obvious ones being milagro XIX “El parto maravilloso” and milagro

¹⁷ This particular inserted quote in Garrosa-Resina’s explanation of crossroads can be found in Brian Dutton’s edition of *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* on page 73, note at verse 147a. Garrosa-Resina uses Dutton’s description to expand his own remarks about milagro XXV “De cómo Teófilo fizo carta con el diablo de su ánima et después fue convertido e salvo”.

XXII "El romero naufragado". In both of these texts, a beatific intervention takes place in the salt waters of the ocean. In the first one, the Virgin Mary appears to a pregnant woman and uses Her cloak to protect her from drowning.

Yo en esto estando, vino Sancta Maria,
cubrióme con la manga de su almexía;
non sentía nul periglo más que quandor dormía,
sí yoguiesse en vanno más leida non sería.

(Stanza 448)¹⁸

As observed earlier in this study, the Virgin Mary is identified with the ocean and the moon. The moon controls the tides, therefore She controls anything that takes place in this dominion. She comes to the rescue of characters who are loyal to Her and are trapped in the ocean. In Marie de France's *Guigemar*, the boat magically guides the knight to a lady over an ocean. He too is saved like the characters of the *Milagros*, not by the Virgin Mary: the *malmariée* saves him from being immune to love.

In milagro XXII "El romero naufragado", a ship has capsized and the only survivor is a pilgrim on his way to the Holy Sepulchre. To demonstrate his loyalty and appreciation to the Virgin for helping him, he tells his story to an audience that had gathered on the shore. As he recites his miracle, someone in the audience records it so that it won't be lost. After this event, the written text travels to many foreign lands, and the narrator states that he has used one of the versions as the base for

18 While I was in this situation, Holy Mary came;
She covered me with the sleeve of Her cloak;
I felt no more danger than when I slept;
if I lay in a bath I would not be happier!
(Stanza 448)

his account. The Virgin's intervention in the shipwreck is described in this manner.

Contaron el miraclo	de la Madre gloriosa,
cómo livró al omne	de la mar periglosa,
dizién todos que fuera	una estranna cosa,
fizieron end escripto,	leyenda muy sabrosa.

Quantos que la udieron	esta sancta razón,
todos a la Gloriosa	dizién <i>grant</i> bendición,
avién por servirla	mejor devoción,
ca esperavan d'ella	mercet e gualardón.

(Stanzas 617-618)¹⁹

The women represented by water in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* and the *Lais* have saving powers. The Virgin Mary rescues two people from drowning and the *malmariée* in *Guigemar* saves the title character from never experiencing love and also from death when she cures his wound. The woman who loves Guigemar has an unusual identity because she appears in human form but the circumstances that surround her are unexplainable. Like most women in the *Lais*, she is described as very beautiful; however like the fairy in *Lanval*, she is from an island.

19 They told of the miracle of the Glorious Mother,
how She freed the man from the perilous sea;
they all said it was a wondrous thing,
they had a delightful story written about it.

However many heard this holy miracle,
they all repeated the prayers to the Glorious One,
they had better devotion in serving Her,
since from Her they hoped for mercy and reward.
(Stanzas 617-618)

Guigemar must travel across an ocean on an enchanted boat to reach her. Islands, Rivers, streams, and oceans are places that lead the human to experience unusual events. In the case of Berceo's text, the ocean is a setting for a beatific intervention. In the *Lais*, human characters leave the natural world through an element that symbolizes life; once the male character arrives at his island-destination, he is renewed and filled with optimism for a new life.

Death is another transition zone in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. There is an example of death earlier when roads are discussed as a transition zone. This event is present in all of Berceo's texts as it is through this experience that the narrator wants to preach salvation to his audience. Once the character dies, he enters a zone that is neither Heaven nor Hell; this is the place where the judgement of the protagonists' sins occurs. There is usually a fight over the soul of the character involving devils, the Virgin Mary and/or saints. In all of the twenty-five texts there is never an occasion when the soul is taken away by the devils to Hell. The sinner has access to a beatific representative in the tug-of-war for his soul, as he or she belongs to the cult of a saint or has prayed daily to the Virgin. Once a positive outcome is reached by the characters in the "death" transition zone, the sinner returns to the natural world to start his penance. It is only through this act of repentance that he will be able to enter Heaven's gates.

The final transition zone in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* is the "dream" world²⁰. The Virgin Mary appears to Her subjects in visions. As

²⁰ The "dream" world I am describing refers to the appearance of the Virgin Mary in a vision, occurring when the protagonist is sleepy, in deep contemplation of his or her sin, when he is drunk, or when he commits an injustice.

a concerned “mother”, She is able to counsel Her servants by what we might call *unconscious*. Dreams, according to Garrosa-Resina are the only way in which Berceo’s characters are able to make important decisions (99). This observation appears in several accounts of the *Milagros*. According to this critic, the visions of the Virgin by Berceo’s characters present superstitious qualities. The characters are compelled to follow the advice She offers because it was revealed to them in a dream or vision (99). In milagro IX “El clérigo simple”, we witness Mary’s appearance in a vision to the Bishop. The Bishop removes a cleric from his post because he could only recite one mass. The Virgin severely reprimands the Bishop for taking away one of Her faithful servants; She even threatens him if he does not reverse his action.

La Virgo gloriosa,	madre sin dicción,
apareció ^o lai al obispo	luego en visión;
dixoli fuertes dichos,	un brabiello sermón,
descubrióli en ello	todo corazón.

Díxoli brabamiente:	“Don obispo lozano,
¿contra mí por qué fust	tan fuet e tan villano?
Yo nunca te tollí	valía de un grano,
e tú áсме tollido	a míun capellano.

El que a mí cantava	la missa cada día,
tú tovist que facié	yerro de eresia;
judguéstilo por bestia	e por cosa radia,
tollisteli la orden	de la capellanía.

Si tú li mandares	decir la missa mía
como solié decirla,	grand querella avría,
e tú serás finado	hasta el trenteno día,
¡Descend verás qué vale	la sanna de María!

Fo con estas menazas	el bispo espantado,
mandó enviãr luego	por el preste vedado;
rogo'l que'l perdonasse	lo que avié errado,
ca fo él en su pleito	durament engannado.

(Stanzas 228-232)²¹

²¹ The merciful Virgin, Mother free from sin,
appeared to the bishop immediately in a vision;
She spoke strong words to him, a very angry sermon;
She revealed the desire of Her heart in it.

She said to him irately: "Imperious Bishop,
why were you so harsh and villainous to me?
I never took a grain's-worth from you,
and you have taken a chaplain from me!

The one who sang Mass to me each day
you held that he was committing an act of heresy;
you judged him as a beast and a thing astray;
you took from him the order of chaplaincy.

If you do not order him to say my Mass
as he was accustomed to say it, there will be a great quarrel
and you will be dead on the thirtieth day.
Then you will see what the wrath of Holy Mary is worth!"

With these threats the bishop was terrified,
immediately he sent for the banned priest;
he begged his pardon for the error he had made,
for he was, in his case, badly deceived.

(Stanzas 228-232)

The Bishop, for fear that Mary would retaliate with vengeance, reinstates the cleric in his former position. Mary's anger could lead to the Bishop's death, which is a severe threat and consequence for taking away one of Her chaplains. The Virgin is a beatific figure that can protect Her servants but She can also become violent when humans commit an offence against Her or one of Her loyal servants. Another case when we see Her anger appears in milagro XVII "La iglesia de la Gloriosa profanada" where the Virgin shows no mercy to knights who killed another man in Her chapel. Her anger and punishment do not diminish until they have begged for Her forgiveness.

La Reina de Gloria	tóvose por prendada,
porque la su egleſia	fincava violada;
peſó'l de corazón,	fo ende despechada.
demoſtrógelo luego	que lis era irada.

Embió Dios en ellos	un fuego infernal,
non ardié e quemava	como el de San Marzal,
quemávalis los miembros	de manera mortal,
dizién a grandes voces:	"¡Sancta María, val!"

Con esta majadura	eran muy maltrechos,
perdién pïedes e manos	e fincavan contrechos,
las piernas e los brazos	bien cerca de los pechos,
iva Sancta María	prendiendo sus derechos.

<i>Entendiénlo los pueblos</i>	<i>ellos no lo negavan,</i>
<i>que ellos merecieron,</i>	<i>por ond tanto lazravan</i>
<i>las virtudes sannosas</i>	<i>que ellas las majavan,</i>
<i>no lo asmavan ellos</i>	<i>quando las violavan.</i>

<i>Los sanctos ni las sanctas</i>	<i>nos lis querién valer,</i>
<i>peoravan cutiano</i>	<i>a muy grant poder;</i>
<i>prisieron un consejo,</i>	<i>ante fuera a prender,</i>
<i>tornar enna Gloriosa</i>	<i>que los fazié arder.</i>

(Stanzas 384-388)²²

²² The Queen of Glory considered Herself insulted
because Her church was violated;
it weighed heavily of Her heart; She was vexed by it.
She quickly showed them that She was angry with them.

God sent upon them an infernal fire;
it did not flame, yet it burned like Saint Martial's fire;
it burned their limbs in a deadly way,
and they cried out loudly: "Holy Mary, Help!"

With this assault they were badly battered,
they lost feet and hands and wound up deformed,
their legs and arms drawn up to their chests;
Holy Mary was collecting Her due.

The people found out about it, and the men did not deny it;
they deserved what they were suffering for it;
they had not considered, when they committed the sacrilege,
the angry Virtues that now battered them.

Neither male not female saints would help them,
so each day they got worse to the maximum degree;
finally they took the path they should have taken before:
they turned to the Glorious One who was making them burn.
(Stanzas 384-388)

The Virgin Mary can appear as a nurturing character but in this case we see a different aspect of Her personality. She can be vindictive and cruel if a sin is committed against Her. The bishop demonstrates his acceptance of the Virgin Mary's messages through his vision of her in milagro IX as he heeds the Virgin's warning and allows the cleric to return to his past.

Learned Elements

Berceo and Marie de France applied many learned and popular elements to the composition of their texts. The factor we have not summarized yet is the importance of the entertainment techniques in the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* and the *Lais*. These signal the rapport between the narrator and his or her audience and are displayed on many occasions throughout the two texts. Berceo's and Marie de France's narrators frequently address the audience in order to keep them entertained and alert to upcoming events in the story. They use the first person singular at the beginning of the narrative to add credibility to the text and to show their authority in its composition. In Chapter 3 we saw that authority designates the ability to interpret or *gloss* another text and the responsibility to communicate a message from an ancient tradition. The opportunity to interpret a text from Antiquity allows the audience to hear two versions of a text: the original and the interpretation. In the case of Berceo, he mentions his name in the text not only as a witness for the credibility of an ancient tradition but also as its messenger. The original Latin versions were written in prose and lacked the details that could keep an audience entertained for hours. To facilitate the transmission of the Latin versions to a public not familiar with this language, Berceo

uses a vernacular language and infuses the Latin versions with popular details.

The original sources for Marie's *Lais* were not written in Latin and so her *gloss* takes a different approach from that of Berceo. She considers the Norman and Breton sources to be of equal value to the texts of classical tradition. Music accompanying the text entertains her audience and helps the narrator to remember his memorized text.

De cest cunte qu'oï avez
fu Guigemar li lais trovez,
que hum fait en harpe e en rote;
bone en est a oïr la note.

(*Guigemar*, lines 883-886)²³

Tristam ki bien saveit harper,
en aveit fet un nuvel lai.

(*Le Chèvrefeuille*, lines 111-112)²⁴

²³ Du conte que vous venez d'entendre,
on a tiré le lai de *Guigemar*,
qu'on joue sur la harpe et la rote:
la musique en est douce à entendre.
(*Guigemar*, lines 883-886)

²⁴ Tristan, qui était bon joueur de harpe,
composa, à la demande de la reine,
un nouveau lai.
(*Le Chèvrefeuille*, lines 111-113)

Music may help make the audience more willing to listen to a few more stories.

To promote the texts of her region, Marie de France has her narrator state that he or she is telling the story because it is true.

L'aventure qu'avez oïe
veraie fu, n'en doutez mie.
De Bisclavret fu fez li lais
pur remembrance a tuz dis mais.

(*Bisclavret*, lines 315-318)²⁵

As the narrator claims credibility for himself/herself, this once folkloric text is brought to the same level as the texts of Antiquity. The narrator's authority rests upon a witness for the audience.

Another factor that makes these texts more believable is that the authors use familiar locations as their settings. All of Marie's *lais* give the location of the events to further establish an element of credibility for her audience. In the *lai Lanval*, the island paradise, where the title character accompanies the fairy, is Avalon. This place is well known in Arthurian legends and undoubtedly was part of the listeners' collective memory. The other *lai* that gives names of landmarks is *Les deux amants*. The narrator tells about the city of Pitres, a place where even to this day the mountain climbed by the knight still stands. On this

²⁵ L'aventure que vous [audience] venez d'entendre
est vraie, n'en doutez pas.
On en a fait le lai de *Bisclavret*,
afin d'en conserver toujours le souvenir.
(*Bisclavret*, lines 315-318)

mountain, a shrine was built there in the XII century and was dedicated to an ascetic couple (Harf-Lancner, 1990: 169). Later in the *lai*, the narrator refers to the city Salerno, a place that was famous in the Middle Ages for its school of medicine (line 103). Details such as these are essential in maintaining the credibility of the *Lais*.

Milagros de Nuestra Señora offers another technique that aids in making the texts more believable; Berceo includes himself when using the word *sinner*. At the end of each milagro, Berceo no longer speaks as an outsider, his tone undergoes a dramatic change. As a writer, Berceo is supposed to have the authority of the authors of the Latin sources to tell and interpret their texts. Instead of considering himself immune to the advice he prescribes, he preaches not only to his audience but to himself as well. He shifts from first person singular to first person plural in the last stanzas of each miracle.

De otro miraclo	vos querria contar
que cunzio en un monge	de abito reglar;
quisolo el diablo	durament espantar,
mas la Madre gloriosa	sopogelo vedar.
	(Milagro XX, Stanza 461) ²⁶

²⁶ I would like to tell you about another miracle
that happened to a monk of a religious order:
the Devil wanted to frighten him severely,
but the Glorious mother knew how to impede him
(Miracle XX, Stanza 461)

Sennores e amigos,	muévanos esta cosa,
amemos e laudemos	todos a la Gloriosa,
non echaremos mano	en cosa tan preciosa,
que tan bien nos accorra	en ora periglosa.

Si nos bien la sirviéramos,	quequiere que ^o l pidamos,
todo lo ganaremos	bien seguros seamos,
aquí lo entendremos	bien ante que muramos,
lo que allí metiéremos	que bien lo empleamos.

Ella nos dé su gracia	e su bendición,
guárdenos de peccado	e de tribulación,
de nuestras liviandades	gánenos remisión,
que non vayan las almas	nuestras en perdición.

(Milagro XX, Stanzas 497-499)²⁷

There is no doubt that this was done on purpose to indicate to his audience that he was not exempt from the lesson he was teaching them.

²⁷ Gentlefolk and friends, let this deed move us,
let us all love and praise the Glorious One,
let us not throw away such a beautiful thing,
which helps us so much in a dangerous hour.

If we will serve Her well, whatever we may ask of Her,
we will gain it all, let us be very sure;
let us understand it here long before we die
that whatever we store there is to our benefit.

May She give us Her grace and Her blessing,
may She keep us from sin and tribulation,
may She win us remission from out licentiousness,
so that our souls may not go to perdition.

(Miracle XX, Stanzas 497-499)

Berceo's solidarity with his audience is also a very effective tool to make them more willing to listen to his tales.

To further demonstrate the learned elements integrated into the *Lais* and *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* we will observe some legal situations and discourse. Both Marie de France and Berceo were familiar with the legal system. Marie de France was also familiar with the use of legal situations, as demonstrated in her *lai Lanval*. Legal discourse functions in conjunction with the feudal hierarchy and all of its rules. It becomes clear in *Lanval* that Marie is very aware of the rules of the Court and the penalties that occur if these rules are ignored or broken. The King accuses the hero of attacking the Queen. As he is the highest person on the feudal hierarchy, he is the judge and the jury is the Court. *Lanval* does not have a defense witness, at least not until the fairy arrives. Once she is able to present his case to the Court and reveal the truth about the Queen's lie, the Court finds him innocent. The real issue on trial in this *lai* is not the alleged attack on the Queen but rather the disloyalty of a vassal to his lord. The relationship between a lord and his vassal was a sacred one and was the most important element needed to preserve the feudal hierarchy. *Lanval* is the only *lai* with a trial, but some of the other *lais* make references to interrogation and "sentencing" by the narrator.

Marie gives other examples in her *Lais* of the importance of preserving the feudal hierarchy. *Equitan* does not have a trial, but a verdict and punishment are mentioned in the last lines. The crime once again is the disloyalty of someone in the feudal agreement. There are two different levels of disloyalty displayed by the characters: the Lord plots the murder of his vassal (*sénéchal*); the wife plots to murder her

husband and lord (sénéchal). Because these two characters are trying to change the sacred order of the hierarchy, they must pay for their greed. The narrator notes that the guilty characters involved in the attempted murder of the sénéchal die in the same manner that they had plotted for him. The verdict of their guilt is saved until the last lines of the *lai* when the husband discovers the lovers in bed. The King's shame prompts him to jump into the boiling water without thinking, causing him to die instantly. The infuriated sénéchal throws his wife into the boiling bath, where she also dies. In this *lai*, the sénéchal is given the role of a judge because he determines the outcome of the situation. There is no forgiveness for an offence to the feudal order.

Issi mururent ambedui,
 li reis avant, ele après lui.
 Ki bien voldreit raisun entendre,
ici purreit ensample prendre:
tels purchase le mal d'altrui,
dunt tuz li mals revert sur lui.

(*Equitan*, lines 311-316)²⁸

²⁸ Ainsi moururent les deux amants,
 le roi d'abord, la dame après de lui.
 A bien réfléchi,
 on pourrait tirer une leçon de ce récit:
 celui qui cherche le malheur d'autrui
 voit le malheur retomber sur lui.

(*Equitan*, lines 311-316)

The italicized portion of this excerpt demonstrates the use of this *lai* as an *exemplum* to the listeners. The order of the feudal hierarchy must be maintained at all costs.

Bisclavret is another *lai* where a judgement is made regarding the cruelty of the wife and her attempt to deceive the feudal order. After the werewolf chews off her nose, the wife undergoes an interrogation. Because she doesn't reveal everything to the King right away, she is tortured until she tells the whole story. Once the monarch proves that *Bisclavret* is the victim of the wife's evil plan, she is banished from the state. This *lai* is another *exemplum* because it outlines clearly what can happen for betraying the loyalty clause of the feudal order.

Berceo, as a notary at the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla was learned in the justice system. Like Marie, he uses his knowledge of legal matters to bring across the importance of following rules. The modern reader can witness the feudal discourse in most of the *milagros*, as the characters must either defend themselves or someone else. Members of the beatific ranks usually represent the sinners that have died and are not able to plead their cases. The beatific hierarchy in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* is divided into different levels for the defense of the sinner. Saints are the sinner's first level of defense as they seek judgement from Christ. When Jesus denies his help to the saints, they turn to the Virgin. Mary is the second level of defense as She receives the sinner's case from the saints and pleads it to Christ. He is the ultimate ruler and judge. However, He always decides in favour of Mary because She is His mother. When the sinner is dead, he or she can plead his or her case directly to the Virgin Mary. In these instances the Virgin Mary acts as a judge and She is able to help him or her make

decisions about his or her life. The Virgin listens to the sinner argue why She should help them. The guilty party gives examples from texts in the *Bible* and other miracle stories about the generosity of the Virgin and God.

"Madre – disse Teófilo -	por Dios e caridat,
non cates al mi mérito,	cata a tu bondat;
de quanto que tú dizes,	todo dizes verdat,
ca só suzio e falso,	pleno de malveztat.

Repiso só, Sennora,	válame penitencia,
éssa salva las almas,	tal es nuestra creencia,
éssa salvó a Peidro	que fizo grand fallencia,
e lavó a Longino	de muy grand violencia.

La sancta Magdalena,	de Lázaro ermana,
peccadriz sin mesura,	ca fue muger liviana,
esso misme te digo	de egipciana,
éssa sanó a ambas,	la que todo mal sana.
[. . .]	

Esta razón, Sennora,	tuya es de veer,
faziendo penitencia	si me deve valer;
Madre, si tú quisiesses	e fuesse tu plaçer,
en mí esti judizio	non devié perecer."

(Milagro XXV, Stanzas 826-828, 831)²⁹

²⁹ "Mother," said Theophilus, "for God and charity, do not look to my merit, look to Your goodness.

As we can see here, Theophilus pleads his case to the Virgin and gives Her examples of sinners that were forgiven by God despite the severity of their crimes. Once the Virgin has heard all of his arguments and She sees that he is truly remorseful for his sin, She is able to forgive him. She even acts as his defense counselor when She pleads the case to Christ. In accordance to his crime, She instructs Theophilus that he must do penance and confess his sin publicly in order to make his forgiveness official. Berceo's knowledge of legal procedures and technique is shown as he has effectively applied them throughout his *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*.

Concluding Remarks

Gonzalo de Berceo and Marie de France are representative of their time and region. Berceo demonstrates the socio-political climate of the

In all that You say, You tell the truth,
for I am dirty and false and full of evil.

I am repentant, Lady, may penitence avail me;
it saves souls, such is our belief.
It saved Saint Peter who did great sin,
and cleansed Longinus of a very great violence.

Holy Magdalene, sister of Lazarus,
sinner beyond measure since she was a loose woman,
I tell You the same thing about the Egyptian,
She, One who cures all evil, cured them both.

[. . .]

This speech, Lady, is Yours to consider,
doing penance thus should help me.
Mother, if You wished and it were Your pleasure,
this judgement ought not perish in me."

(Miracle XXV, Stanzas 826-828, 831)

Rioja region in the thirteenth century by means of popular details that are incorporated into Latin versions of his text. As a gifted scholar he is able to mix with harmony learned elements, such as legal discourse, verse structure, appeals to his audience, and a classical tradition with popular images, dialogue, and refrains from his region and century. The pilgrimage routes from Roncesvalles to Santiago de Compostela brought many foreign influences from Europe to the Iberian Peninsula. We have looked at the knights that traveled to the Peninsula in search of Christianizing the heathens. The infiltration of foreigners allowed for certain infusions to take place within religion, literature, art and elsewhere. For the purpose of this study, we have concentrated on the influences in religious doctrine as well as those present in literature. Berceo was educated in a French-founded monastery and therefore he received the reformed doctrine of Rome. There were other forms of religious liturgy present in the Iberian Peninsula but these were considered to be heresy by the Church in Rome. As Berceo is thought to have studied at the University of Palencia, a French-founded institution, he would have been schooled in the same subjects that were considered to be important in France. These influences are what allowed the *Mester de Clerecía* to be created. Berceo is obviously aware of life in urban areas as he integrates certain aspects into his text. The monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla is located on the way to Santiago de Compostela in the *French Pilgrims* trail, and as the name implies, many French pilgrims traveled and visited the shrine of the Virgin in the monastery's valley. The Courts and their entertainment left significant influences present in the work of Gonzalo de Berceo. Along with foreign influences that were adopted the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, we find the names of French

locations and the use of Provençal endings and words. We can also observe the French influenced anti-Semitism in several of Berceo's stories. This is not to say that this sentiment was not felt in other parts of Europe at this time as well: However, critics believe that Berceo was influenced in this idea because he was educated in two French-based institutions. Another factor attributed to the rise of foreign influenced anti-Semitism is the presence of French soldiers in the *Reconquista*. This Crusade was supposed to rid the Iberian Peninsula of all foreign religions: Judaism, Islam and heterodox versions of Christianity. All of these contribute to the composition of *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*.

Marie de France demonstrates to the modern reader the importance of certain issues of the worldly hierarchy in the *Lais*. Unlike Berceo, her texts were not meant for an urban population, they were destined for the Royal Court. In Chapter 3 we saw how the Northern poets in medieval France were influenced by the troubadours in the South. The troubadours themselves were inspired by their travels abroad, which included visits to foreign lands such as medieval Italy, Spain and the Holy Land.

Marie de France writes about the feudal hierarchy but concentrates on the upper levels of this pyramid. Besides focusing on the feudal world, she also presents noble women and their roles in society. Her stories do not indicate as much information regarding social changes as Berceo's text. The *lais* themselves are short narratives that tell the local folklore of the region and have been transformed from oral texts to octosyllabic verses. In these verses we discover that she has integrated several popular elements into the stories. The popular elements evoked during this study are those of magical beasts that began

as humans or possess human qualities, fairies and supernatural worlds. Along with these factors we find interwoven in the *Lais* some examples of rhetorical techniques such as the integration of musical accompaniment and addresses to an audience.

As in *Milagros*, her narrator communicated with her listener by employing the first person singular tense thus forming a bond with her public. In Marie's verse structure we also witness the incorporation of popular refrains as well as many learned elements to give her sources more credibility. Since her text is not derived from Latin texts, she must give her sources, Norman and Breton oral folkloric texts, the same importance as the classical texts of Antiquity. She explains that she wants to be more original in treating subjects that her contemporaries had not explored. She states very clearly that she is an educated writer because she is familiar with reading works of "Les Anciens" (*Prologue*, line 9); she implies that she is also educated in Latin as she rejects translating texts from that language into the vernacular. Like Berceo, Marie de France chooses to tell her stories in the vernacular language and in so doing makes her audience's interest in the texts increase because they were told in the same language they used every day. As the majority of her *lais* indicate, the behaviour of the nobles as presented by Marie allows the modern reader to understand the main concerns of her society, the most important being the loyalty between a vassal and his lord. There are many variations of this point in the *Lais* and some of the circumstances involve supernatural beasts being loyal to a lord, for example, Bisclavret and the King. The vassal-lord relationship present in Marie de France's texts is similar to Berceo's vassalage to the Virgin Mary. He pledges his loyalty and dedicates his collection of milagros to

Her as a symbol of his loyalty. Mary will reciprocate his offering by taking an active role in his salvation when he dies.

Even though Marie de France and Gonzalo de Berceo are from different regions and centuries, common threads are present throughout their texts that indicate closeness. They are preoccupied with preserving the rules of their hierarchies. Marie de France tries to preserve the ideals of feudalism and Berceo tries to preserve the reformed rules of the Church in Rome. They composed *Milagros* and *Lais* to entertain different kinds of audiences and they make use of local superstitions and language to communicate their stories. Berceo is a *juglar* for his audience but he is also an educator. The lesson he tries to communicate in all of his *milagros* is the grace and kindness of the Virgin Mary. He believes that as long as the sinner serves Her loyally, he or she will be defended from evil and forgiven by Mary and God. By putting himself at the same level as his audience, Berceo becomes more credible because he has formed a strong bond with them. Marie de France uses a similar technique, she includes her name in the narrative. The popular refrains used in the text demonstrate a close tie with the folkloric roots of the *Lais*. Elements such as these ones are borrowed from classical Antiquity to create a rapport with the audience. Marie de France and Gonzalo de Berceo are talented composers because they have merged the *popular* and *official* cultures, something that Bakhtin said could never happen. Bakhtin states in *Rabelais and His World* that the *official* culture and the *popular* culture could never co-exist because the institutions oppressed the townspeople. If we believe that Bakhtin's statement is true, where would we place Marie de France and Berceo? They are both members of the *official* culture and yet they manage to integrate the voices and

laughter of the *popular culture* in their texts. They are contradictions to Bakhtin's definitions as they demonstrate a link between these two cultures. The medieval world is not as black and white as the Russian philosopher suggests, there are infusions of bright colours present in the works of Berceo and Marie de France. Even though Berceo and Marie de France's texts are meant for the entertainment of two different audiences, they offer the modern reader a scope into their worlds.

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