

PREFACE

There is something in the way certain poets can capture the complexities of the universe in the confines of their verses that invites admiration, while concomitantly awakening an appreciation of beauty. Such poets allow readers congress with the striking or the unusual by means of familiar frameworks or cues. They open our eyes to the quotidian in a revelatory fashion. Their poems' very sounds, flow, and alternations between long and short stresses often underscore and become a part of a multiply layered entry into a new perspective. More importantly, their enchanting images create associations and remembrances of other tales, which can fill in, layer, accompany, and in this sense, gloss the story being told. In doing so, other kinds of alternating stresses are created, inviting readers to plunge into different literary worlds and return, as the poem's images awaken memory and allow readers to create their own *conjointures* by weaving other literary *auctores* along with their own experiences into these images.

In this introductory paragraph, I just joined two very dissimilar metaphors: those of waves and of weaving. I see their juxtaposition as capturing the problem poets can face: on the one hand, there is the oceanically expansive, highly complex vision they wish to convey; on the other hand, there is linear, time-bound language with which they must weave their tales. In this study, I explore this juxtaposition by looking at a few narratives by two poets, Ovid and Marie de France.

In a sense, an ocean is imaged through its waves, and I have used a line from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to bring this to mind in this study, a line that compares a river's flow to time's linear movement: "ut unda inpellitur unda" [XV.181: as wave pushes upon wave]. Not unlike the movement of waves that rise to a crest only to fall into a trough—and like a poem's meter—narrative events, allusions, images, and *topoi* follow a linear path rhythmically, and are supported by the depths below. Suggesting that time moves the universe endlessly along, the movement of waves reflects the literary universe as well. The alternation of battle with peace, of a kingdom's destruction with a new kingdom's founding, of the joy lovers share with jealousy-inspired intrigue—all these crests and troughs provide familiar *loci* for *litterati*. But in addition, the ocean's waves suggest how poetry itself survives time's relentless movement, from the inspired creation of a metaphor to an accepted convention, back and forth, all created and used to convey the depths of some poetic vision.

While it would probably be easier, given language's linear demands, to separate crests from troughs into oppositions, both Ovid and Marie connect endpoints or other perceived divisions into fluid movement. For example, using lovers who also serve as personae for writers and readers, Ovid and Marie suggest similarities rather than the separation ordinarily characterizing these denizens of the literary world. Rather than the authoritative writer, who precedes the reader, and the reader, who avidly and attentively receives the crafted message, Ovid and Marie suggest that no writer is not also a reader, and no reader is so completely passive that he or she does not somehow weave the story into his or her own. In other words, rather than separate members of a chronologically linear relationship, in Ovid and Marie, writers are readerly and readers are writerly.

When readerly writers weave various striking threads into their narratives, they can create *loci memoriae* that enchant writerly readers to pause and look for the stories implicit in those threads and to link them to the story being told. Both Ovid and Marie rely on their readers to do so and also invite them, in the tales of interest to this study, to ponder on the theme of literature as memorial as well. They suggest that to avoid becoming a static monument, literature must count on writers and readers' knowledge, willingness, imagination, and ability to link *topoi*, allusions, images, and *auctores*.

In such fluid relations, readers thus dovetail with writers—another analogy I will use in this study, and one that applies to the two poets examined here as well. For Marie does not imitate Ovid, nor does she allow herself to be influenced by him wholesale. Rather, it seems to me, she imagines Ovid to be her conversational partner, and consequently, she has crafted a number of her *lais* in a manner that complements, seamlessly, some of his tales. Like carefully honed pieces, which fit so perfectly that their boundaries are barely detectable, Marie shapes the *lais* examined here to dovetail with stories from the *Metamorphoses*. In doing so, she re-members Ovid in a way that refuses to conventionalize him into the *auctor* of medieval commentaries or the *doctor amoris* of love's literature. Reading Marie against Ovid from this perspective allows conversations to flourish and admiration to be re-ignited. Not coincidentally, I think, Ovid was just such a reader of the authoritative literature of his time as well.

I was first enchanted by Marie's verses in a modern French prose version assigned in a seminar during my senior year at college. Since that encounter, she has been one of my touchstones for that which is poetic. Re-reading Ovid in tandem with Marie's verses has allowed me to see the macrocosmic rather than only the microcosmic in his

tales. Some of my ruminations along the way were published in various fora, some of which appear here in transformed, and, hopefully, a more resonant manner. Thus, chapter 1 uses material from “Transforming Lovers and Memorials in Ovid and Marie de France,” *Florilegium* 14 (1995-96) 99-122, while chapter 2 borrows from “Echoes and Reflections of Enigmatic Beauty in Ovid and Marie de France,” *Speculum* 73 (1998) 372-396. Likewise, chapter 4 draws upon some material found in a Festschrift for Peter Dembowski, *Philologies Old and New*, “Wrapping Memory Around the Metaphor in Marie de France’s *Chievrefoil*,” (Princeton: Romanance Languages and Literatures, 2001) 213-226.

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