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`Anyone who does not hear the song of the nightingale knows none of the joys of this world'

Marie de France (fl. late twelfth century) is the earliest known French woman poet and her *lais* - stories in verse based on Breton tales of chivalry and romance - are among the finest of the genre. Recounting the trials and tribulations of lovers, the *lais* inhabit a powerfully realized world where very real human protagonists act out their lives against fairy-tale elements of magical beings, potions and beasts. Throughout, Marie de France takes a subtle and complex view of courtly love, whether telling the story of the knight who betrays his fairy mistress, or describing the noblewoman who embroiders her sad tale on a shroud for a nightingale killed by a jealous and suspicious husband.

Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby's prose translation is accompanied by an introduction, which examines authorship and the central themes of the *lais*. This edition also includes a bibliography, notes, an index of proper names, and three *lais* in the Old French original: *Lanval*, *Laüstic* and *Chevrefoil*.