If Marie de France is best known to modern scholarship as the author of the 12 lais bretons included, with prologue, in London, British Library, Harley 978, her celebrity—if such it can be considered—in the Middle Ages was of a different order. The well-known allusion to Marie as an author of lais in the Vie de saint Edmund le rei by Denis Piramus is of a specific time, place, and context, quite close to those of Marie:

E dame Marie autresi,
Ki en rime fist e basti
E compassa les vers de lais,
Ke ne sunt pas del tut verais;
E si en est ele mult loée
E la rime par tut amée,
Kar mult l’aime, si l’unt mult cher
Cunte, barun e chivaler . . . (vv. 35–42)¹

[And likewise lady Marie, who put into rhyme, constructed, and arranged verses of lais, which are not true at all (not completely true?); and she is much praised for it and her rhymes appreciated everywhere, for many people like them, and counts, barons, and knights appreciate them.]

Once we leave the southern England of the latter part of the 12th century, however, Marie largely vanishes as an author of lais until she is rediscovered, through Harley 978, by the likes of De la Rue and Roquefort in the early days of romance philology. What I mean by this is that the prologue to Guigemar in Harley 978 and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 2168 (“Marit” in the latter),² and the allusion in the life of Edmund are the only forms of textual evidence attesting to the existence of an author by the name of Marie, and not even

¹ La vie seint Edmund le rei, poème anglo-normand du XIf siècle, ed. Hilding Kjellman (Göteborg, 1935).
Marie de France at that, who composed *lais*. I take Harley 978 (England, possibly Oxford, c.1265) to be the earliest manuscript containing any of the *Lais* and believe that it may preserve the final arrangement, perhaps even authorial, of the 12 individual tales. The unusual form of the name (“Marit: oblit”) in fr. 2168 (Picardy, s. 13\(^{2/2}\)) might indicate lack of familiarity in northeastern France in the later 13th century with the notion of Marie, the author. But unless Denis Piramus is exaggerating, we may conclude that a person by the name of Marie was known as an author of *lais* in knightly and aristocratic circles of her own time. If this is the case, then either time has been harsh on the early manuscript corpus or the *Lais* may have been initially transmitted orally for the large part, the transmission culminating in Harley 978, their *mise en remembrance*. Denis echoes Marie’s own emphasis on the poetic form of the *lais* (not specified as *bretons*, however), in terminology that has finally received the close scrutiny it deserves.\(^3\)

For good measure, I note that “de France” is only associated with an author who refers to herself as Marie in the epilogue to the *Fables*,\(^4\) the manuscript transmission of which I treat by and large separately from that of the *Lais* and the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz*. Even in the epilogue to the *Fables*, “de France”\(^5\) simply designates Marie’s provenance on the Continent and is not to be taken in any sense as a family name, short of accepting the implausible theory that she was of the French royal house. The attribution to the same author (“Jo, Marie, ai mis en memoire / Le livre de l’Espurgatoire / En roman z” [vv. 2297–99]) of the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz* in BnF, fr. 25407 (England, s. 13\(^{4/4}\)) seems probable, while that of *La vie seinte Audree* in the Welbeck Abbey manuscript of saints’ lives (London, BL, Add. 70513 [England, s. 13\(^{4/4}\)]) cannot reasonably be confirmed on linguistic grounds, *pace* Södergård et al.\(^6\)


\(^4\) In this chapter, I use both *Fables* and *Ysope* to designate the same collection of animal tales attributed to Marie.

\(^5\) Epilogue, vv. 1–4, in *Die Fabeln der Marie de France*, ed. Karl Warnke (Halle, 1898).

\(^6\) The *Espurgatoire* has been the object of three excellent editions, by T. Atkinson Jenkins (Philadelphia, 1894; Chicago, 1903), Karl Warnke (Halle, 1938), and most recently by Yolande de Pontfarcy (Louvain, 1995); *La vie seinte Audree, poème anglo-normand du XIIe siècle*, ed. Östen Södergård (Uppsala/Wiesbaden, 1955), pp. 38–39 and 55, whose conclusions that the language and versification of the *Audree* conform to continental usage of the end of the 12th century would at a stretch permit an