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BACKGROUNDS AND CONTEXTS
CRITICISM

Translated and Edited by
DOROTHY GILBERT

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Bisclavret[†]

Quant des lais faire m'entremet,
 Ne voil ublier *Bisclavret*;
Bisclavret ad nun en bretan;
 4 *Garwaf* l'apelent li Norman.

Jadis le poeit hum oïr
 E sovent suleit avenir,
 Hume plusur garval devindrent
 8 E es boscages meisun tindrent.
 Garvalf, ceo cest beste salvage;
 Tant cum il est in cele rage,
 Hummes devure, grant mal feit,
 12 Es granz forez converse e vait.
 Cest afere les ore ester;
 Del Bisclavret vus voil cunter.

En Bretagne maneit uns ber;
 16 Merveille l'ai oï loër;
 Beaus chevaliers e bons esteit

Bisclavret¹

In crafting lays, I won't forget
 —I mustn't—that of Bisclavret;
Bisclavret: so named in Breton;
 4 But *Garwaf* in the Norman tongue.²

One used to hear, in times gone by
 —it often happened, actually—
 men became werewolves, many men,
 8 and in the forest made their den.
 A werewolf is a savage beast;
 in his blood-rage, he makes a feast
 of men, devours them, does great harms,
 12 and in vast forests lives and roams.
 Well, for now, let us leave all that;
 I want to speak of Bisclavret.

In Brittany there lived a lord
 16 —wondrous, the praise of him I've heard—
 a good knight, handsome, known to be

1. Lycanthropy—belief in werewolves—was an intensely popular belief in the Middle Ages, and it figures frequently in folklore and also in literature: *lais*, romances, fabliaux and beast fables. Versions of this story appear as early as in Roman works by Pliny (*Natural History*) and Petronius (*The Satyricon*). Marie's story may well have contributed to later versions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as the *Roman de Reynart le Contrefait*, where the hero is called Bisclarel and the king is Arthur.

In their version of the *Lais*, Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante comment: "In Marie's hands, the story of the man compelled by fortune (*aventure*) to spend part of his existence as a beast of prey in the forest becomes a parable about the forces of bestiality that exist within human nature and how they should (and should not) be transcended. None of the *lais* is more deeply concerned with the fragility of social existence, given the battle within men and women between their higher and baser impulses, but Bisclavret is also concerned with the human capacity to manifest nobility even under the most trying conditions, and thus to transcend the animal part of our nature and garner the hardwon benefits of civilization" (*The Lais of Marie de France*, 101).

2. Ewert derives the name *bisclavret* from the Breton *bleis laouaret*, "speaking wolf" (*Marie de France, Lais*, 172). Jean Rychner, in his perhaps even more authoritative edition, mentions as well an alternative opinion, in which the form *bisclavret* may derive from *bisc lavret*, which suggests a wolf in pants or breeches, a different human characteristic. *Garwaf* (with other variant spellings in the manuscripts) is, Rychner thinks, probably scribal misspelling of the normal words *garolf* or *garou(s)*, which ultimately derive from earlier words (Old English, Franconian, Latin) meaning "man-wolf" (*Les Lais de Marie de France*, 252).

I follow Rychner in using the capital "B" in "Bisclavret" when the creature is referred to by his proper name (e.g., "I want to speak of Bisclavret" [line 14]). When he is referred to as a creature (e.g., "the bisclavret" [line 223]), I follow Rychner in using the lower-case initial "b." Ewert capitalizes the word throughout, with the exception of line 63, where the husband confesses to his wife, "Dame, I become a bisclavret." The capitalization and proper name for me imply man's estate (though of course animals can have proper names); Ewert's choice suggests that he regards the creature as a man throughout, except in this confession of animality to his subsequently horrified wife.

[†] From Jean Rychner, ed., *Les Lais de Marie de France*, Les Classiques Français du Moyen Age, ed. Mario Roques (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1966), 61–71. Note that there is variation in spelling: Rychner follows the orthography of, mainly, BL MS 978 (H), a mid-thirteenth-century document. The twelfth-century poet and the scribes subsequently recording her work lived before orthography was standardized, and their Anglo-Norman-French dialect differed considerably from modern French.

E noblement se cunteneit.
 De sun seinur esteit privez
 20 E de tuz veisins amez.
 Femme ot espusé mut vailant
 E ki mut feseit beu semblant.
 Il amot li e ele lui,
 24 Mes d'une chose ert grant ennui,
 Qu'en la semeine le perdeit
 Treis jurs entiers, qu'el ne saveit
 U deveneit ne u alout;
 28 Ne nus de soens nient n'en sout.
 Une feiz esteit repeiriez,
 A sa meisun, joius e liez;
 Demandé li ad e enquis;
 32 "Sire," fet el, "beaus duz amis,
 Une chose vuz demandasse
 Mut volentiers, si jeo osasse,
 Mes jeo criem tant vostre curut
 36 Que nule rien tant ne redut."
 Quant il l'oï, si l'acola,
 Vers lui la traist, si la beisa.
 "Dame," fet il, "car demandez!
 40 Ja cele chose ne querrez,
 Si jo le sai, ne la vus die."
 "Par fei," fet ele, "or sui garie!
 Sire, jeo sui en tel esfrei
 44 Les jurs quant vus partez de mei,
 El cuer en ai mut grant dolur
 E de vus perdre tel poür,
 Si jeo n'en ai hastif cunfort,
 48 Bien tost en puis avoir la mort.
 Kar me dites u vus alez,
 U vus estes, u conversez!
 Mun escient que vus amez,
 52 E si si est, vus meserrez.
 "Dame," fet il, "pur Deu merci!
 Mal m'en vendra si jol vus di,
 Kar de m'amur vus partirai;
 56 E mei meïsmes en perdrai."
 Quant la dame l'ad entendu,
 Ne l'ad neent en gab tenu:
 Suventefeiz li demanda,
 60 Tant le blandi e losenga,
 Que s'aventure li cunta;
 Nule chose ne li cela.

all that makes for nobility.
 Prized, he was, much, by his liege lord;
 20 by all his neighbors was adored.
 He'd wed a wife, a worthy soul,
 most elegant and beautiful;
 he loved her, and she loved him, too.
 24 One thing she found most vexing, though.
 During the week he'd disappear
 for three whole days, she knew not where;
 what happened to him, where he went.
 28 His household, too, was ignorant.
 He returned home again one day;
 high-spirited and happy. She
 straightway proceeded to inquire:
 32 "My fair sweet friend," she said, "fair sire,
 if I just dared, I'd ask of you
 a thing I dearly wish to know,
 except that I'm so full of fear
 36 of your great anger, husband dear."
 When he had heard this, he embraced her,
 drew her to him, clasped and kissed her.
 "Lady," he said, "come, ask away!
 40 Nothing you wish, dear, certainly
 I will not tell you, that I know."
 "Faith!" she said, "you have cured me so!
 But I have such anxiety,
 44 sire, on those days you part from me,
 my heart is full of pain. I fear
 so much that I will lose you, dear.
 Oh, reassure me, hastily!
 48 If you do not, I soon will die.
 Tell me, dear husband; tell me, pray,
 What do you do? Where do you stay?
 It seems to me you've found another!
 52 You wrong me, if you have a lover!"
 "Lady," he said, "have mercy, do!
 I'll have much harm in telling you.
 I'd lose your love, if I should tell
 56 and be lost to myself, as well."
 Now when the wife was thus addressed,
 it seemed to her to be no jest.
 Oftimes she begged, with all her skill,
 60 coaxing and flattering, until
 at last he told her all he did,
 the tale entire; kept nothing hid.

"Dame, jeo devienç bisclavret.
 64 En cele grant forest me met,
 Al plus espés de la gaudine,
 S'il vif de preie e de ravine."
 Quant il li avait tut cunté,
 68 Enquis li ad e demaundé
 S'il se despuille u vet vestuz.
 "Dame," fet il, "jeo vois tuz nuz."
 "Di mei, pur Deu, u sunt vos dras?"
 72 "Dame, ceo ne dirai jeo pas,
 Kar si jes eüsse perduz
 E de ceo feusse aparceüz,
 Bisclavret sereie a tuz jurs.
 76 Ja nen avreie mes sucurs
 De si k'il me fussent rendu.
 Pur ceo ne voil k'il seit seü.
 "Sire," la dame li respunt,
 80 "Jeo vus eim plus que tut le mund!
 Nel me devez nient celer,
 Ne mei de nule rien duter:
 Ne semblereit pas amistié!
 84 Qu'ai jeo forfait? Pur queil pechié
 Me dutez vus de nule rien?
 Dites le mei, si ferez bien!
 Tant l'anguissa, tant le suzprist,
 88 Ne pout el faire, si li dist.
 "Dame," fet il, "delez cel bois,
 Lez le chemin par unt jeo vois,
 Une vielz chapele i esteit,
 92 Ki mentefeiz grant bien me feit;
 La est la pierre cruose e lee,
 Suz un bussun, dedenz cavee;
 Mes dras i met, suz le buissun,
 96 Tant que jeo revienç a meisun."
 La dame oï cele merveille,
 De poür fu tute vermeille.
 De l'aventure s'esfrea.
 100 En maint endroit se purpensa
 Cum ele s'en puïst partir:
 Ne voleit mes lez lui gisir.

Un chevalier de la cuntree,
 104 Ki lungement l'aveit amee
 E mut preie e mut requise

"Dame, I become a bisclavret.
 64 in the great forest I'm afoot,
 in deepest woods, near thickest trees,
 and live on prey I track and seize."
 When he had told the whole affair,
 68 she persevered; she asked him where
 his clothes were; was he naked there?
 "Lady," he said, "I go all bare."
 "Tell me, for God's sake, where you put
 your clothes!"
 72 "Oh, I'll not tell you that:
 I would be lost, you must believe,
 if it were seen just how I live.
 Bisclavret would I be, forever;
 76 never could I be helped then, never,
 till I got back my clothes, my own;
 that's why their cache must not be known."
 "Sire," said his lady in reply,
 80 "more than all earth I love you. Why
 hide, why have secrets in your life?
 Why, why mistrust your own dear wife?
 That does not seem a loving thought.
 84 What have I done? What sin, what fault
 has caused your fear, in any way?
 You must be fair! You have to say!"
 So she harassed and harried him
 88 So much, he finally gave in.
 "Lady," he said, "just by the wood,
 just where I enter, by the road,
 there's an old chapel. Now, this place
 92 has often brought me help and grace.
 There is a stone there, in the brush,
 hollow and wide, beneath a bush.
 In brush and under bush, I store
 96 my clothes, till I head home once more."
 The lady was amazed to hear:
 She blushed deep red, from her pure fear.
 Terror, she felt, at this strange tale.
 100 She thought what means she could avail
 herself of how to leave this man.
 She could not lie with him again.

In these parts lived a chevalier
 104 who had long been in love with her.
 Much did he pray and sue, and give

E mut duré en sun servise,
 Ele ne l'aveit unc amé
 108 Ne de s'amur aseüré
 Celui manda par sun message,
 Si li descovri sun curage:
 "Amis," fet ele, "seiez liez!
 112 Ceo dunt vus estes travaillez
 Vus otri jeo sanz nul respit;
 Ja n'i avrez nul cuntredit.
 M'amur e mon cors vus otrei:
 116 Vostre drue fetes de mei!"
 Cil l'en merci bonement
 E la fiance de li prent,
 E el le met par serement.
 120 Pui li cunta cumfaitement
 Ses sire ala e k'il devint.
 Tute la veie ke il tint
 Vers la forest li enseigna;
 124 Pur sa despuille l'enveia.
 Issi fu Bisclavret trahiz
 E par sa femme maubailiz.
 Pur ceo qu'hum le perdeit sovent,
 128 Quidouent tuit communalment
 Que dunc s'en fust del tut alez.
 Asez fu quis e demandez,
 Mes n'en porent mie trover;
 132 Si lur estuit lessier ester.
 La dame ad cil dunc espusee
 Que lungement aveit amee.

 Issi remest un an entier,
 136 Tant que li reis ala chacier.
 A la forest ala tut dreit,
 La u li bisclavret esteit.
 Quant li chien furent descuplé,
 140 Le bisclavret unt encuntré
 A li cururent tute jur

largesse in service to his love;³
 she had not loved him, nor had she
 108 granted him any surety
 that she, too, loved; but now she sent
 this knight the news of her intent.
 "Friend," she wrote him, "rejoice, and know
 112 that for which you have suffered so,
 I grant you now without delay;
 I'll not hold back in any way.
 My body and my love I grant;
 116 make me your mistress, if you want!"
 Kindly he thanked her, and her troth
 accepted; she received his oath.
 She told her lover how her lord
 120 went to the wood, and what he did,
 what he became, once he was there.
 She told in detail how and where
 to find the road and clothing cache;
 124 and then she sent him for the stash.
 Thus was Bisclavret trapped for life;
 ruined, betrayed, by his own wife.⁴
 Because his absences were known,
 128 people assumed he'd really gone,
 this time, for good. They searched around,
 enough, but he could not be found,
 for all their inquiries. At last
 132 everyone let the matter rest.
 The lady wed the chevalier
 who'd been so long in love with her.

A whole year, after this event,
 136 thus passed. The king went out to hunt,
 went to the forest straightaway,
 there where the bisclavret now lay.
 The hunting dogs were now unleashed
 140 and soon they found the changeling beast.
 All day they flung themselves at him,

3. In other words, the chevalier, doing service to his lady love in the courtly mode, was performing acts of generosity—largesse—in honor of her, hoping to exalt his spirit, be worthy of her, and earn her approval and her love.

4. Hanning and Ferrante observe that the wife's betrayal and the stealing of the werewolf's clothing are "reciprocal metaphors; both embody a loss of that civilizing force in life—symbolized at the surface level by apparel, at a deeper level by the love relationship—which saves humanity from perpetual servitude to its lower, amoral impulses, and allows it to engage in the satisfying social relationships enumerated in Marie's opening statement about the protagonist" (103).

E li chien e li veneür,
 Tant que pur poi ne l'eurent pris
 144 E tut deciré e maumis.
 Des que il ad li rei choisi,
 Vers li curut quere merci.
 Il l'aveit pris par sun estrié
 148 La jambe li baise e le pié.
 Li reis le vit, grant poür ad;
 Ses cumpainuns tuz apelad:
 "Seignurs," fet il, "avant venez!
 152 Ceste merveillë esgardez,
 Cum ceste beste s'humilie!
 Ele ad sen d'hume, merci crie.
 Chaciez mei tuz chiens ariere,
 156 Si gardez que hum ne la fiere!
 Ceste beste ad entente e sen.
 Espleitiez vus! Alum nus en!
 A la beste durrai ma pes,
 160 Kar jeo ne chacerai hui mes."

Li reis s'en est turnez a tant.
 Li bisclavret le vet siwant;
 Mut se tint pres, n'en vout partir
 164 Il n'ad cure de lui guerpier.
 Li reis l'enmeine en sun chastel.
 Mut en fu liez, mut li est bel,
 Kar unke mes tel n'ot veü.
 168 A grant merveille l'ot tenu
 E mut le tient a grant chierté.
 A tuz les suens ad comaundé
 Que sur s'amur le gardent bien
 172 E ne li mesfacent de rien
 Ne par nul d'eus ne seit feruz;
 Bien seit abevreiz e peüz.
 Cil le garderent volontiers.
 176 Tuz jurs entre les chevaliers
 E pres del rei s'alout cuchier.
 N'i ad celui ki ne l'ad chier,
 Tant esteit francs e deboneire;

all day pursued, both dogs and men;
 they almost had him. Now they'd rend
 144 and tear him; now he'd meet his end.
 His eye, distinguishing, could see
 the king; to beg his clemency
 he seized the royal stirrup, put
 148 a kiss upon the leg and foot.
 The king, observing, felt great fear.
 Calling his men, he cried, "Come here!"
 "Lords!" he said, "Come and look at this!
 152 See what a marvel is this kiss,
 this humble, gracious gesturing!
 That's a man's mind; it begs the king
 for mercy. Now, drive back the hounds!
 156 See that none strike or give it wounds.
 This beast has mind; it has intent.
 Come, hurry up! It's time we went.
 I'll give protection for this beast.
 160 And for today, the hunt has ceased."⁵

The king had turned around, at that;
 following him, the bisclavret
 close by; he would not lose the king,
 164 abandon him, for anything.
 The king then led the beast, to bring
 it to the castle, marvelling,
 rejoicing at it, for he'd never,
 168 seen such a wondrous creature, ever.
 He loved the wolf and held it dear
 and he charged every follower
 that, for his love, they guard it well
 172 and not mistreat the animal.
 No one must strike it; and, he'd said,
 it must be watered and well fed.
 Gladly his men now guarded it.
 176 Among the knights, the bisclavret
 now lived, and slept close by the king;
 everyone loved it, cherishing
 its noble bearing and its charm.

5. Cf. the famous story of Actaeon as told by the Roman poet Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, an immensely popular and influential work in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In that tale the unfortunate hunter Actaeon happens to see—by *aventure*, as Marie would say—the goddess Diana bathing naked, which enrages her; she turns him into a stag, and he is mauled to death by his hounds. He has a human mind in a stag's body but no opportunity to prove it and thus be recognized as human and saved. This story would certainly have been well known to Marie and her original audience, and the knowledge might well have added suspense to Marie's episode.

180 Unques ne volt a rien mesfeire.
 U ke li reis deüst errer,
 Il n'out cure de desevrer;
 Ensemble od lui tuz jurs alout;
 184 Bien s'aparceit que il l'amout.

Oëz après cument avint!
 A une curt ke li reis tint
 Tuz les baruns aveit mandez,
 188 Ceus ke furent de lui chalez,
 Pur aidier sa feste a tenir
 E lui plus beal faire servir.
 Le chevaliers i est alez
 192 Richement e bien aturnez,
 Ki la femme de Bisclavret ot.
 Il ne saveit ne ne quidot
 Qu'il le deüst trover si pres!
 196 Si tost com il vint al paleis
 E li bisclavret l'aperceut,
 De plein esleis vers lui curut;
 As denz le prist, vers lui le trait.
 200 Ja li eüst mut grant leid fait,
 Ne fust le reis ki l'apela,
 D'une verge le manaça.
 Deus feiz le vout mordre le jur!
 204 Mut s'esmerveillent li plusur,
 Kar unkes tel semblant ne fist
 Vers nul hume ke il veüst.
 Ceo dient tuit par la meisun
 208 K'il ne fet mie sans reisun:
 Mesfeit il ad, coment que seit,
 Kar voluntiers se vengereit.
 A cele feiz remest issi,
 212 Tant ke la feste departi
 E li barun unt pris cungié,
 A lur meisun sunt repeirié.
 Alez s'en est li chevaliers
 216 Mien escient tut as premiers,
 Que li bisclavret asailli.
 N'est merveille s'il le haï!

Ne fu puis gueres lungement,
 220 Ceo m'est avis, si cum j'entent,
 Qu'a la forest ala li reis,
 Ki tant fu sages e curteis,

180 It never wanted to do harm,
 and where the king might walk or ride,
 there it must be, just at his side,
 wherever he might go or move;
 184 so well it showed its loyal love.

What happened after that? Now, hear.
 The king held court; he had appear
 all barons, vassals; gave commands
 188 to all who held from him their lands,
 to help a festival take place,
 serving with elegance and grace.
 Among those chevaliers was he
 192 —so richly dressed, so splendidly!—
 who'd wed the wife of Bisclavret.
 Little he knew or thought just yet
 that he would find his foe so near!
 196 Soon as he came, this chevalier,
 to court, and Bisclavret could see
 the man, he ran up furiously,
 sank in his teeth, and dragged him close.
 200 Many the injuries and woes
 he would have suffered, but the king
 called out commands, while brandishing
 his staff. The beast rushed, twice, that day,
 204 to bite the man; all felt dismay,
 for none had seen the beast display
 toward anyone, in any way,
 such viciousness. There must be reason,
 208 the household said, for him to seize on
 the knight, who must have done him wrong;
 the wish for vengeance seemed so strong.

And so they let the matter rest
 212 till the conclusion of the feast.
 The barons took their leave, each one,
 each to his castle and his home.
 All my good judgment counsels me
 216 he who was first to leave was he
 set upon by the bisclavret.
 Small wonder the beast had such hate!

Not too long after this occurred
 220 —such is my thought, so I have heard—
 into the forest went the king
 —so noble and so wise a being—

U li bisclavret fu trovez;
 224 E il i est od lui alez.
 La nuit, quant il s'en repeira,
 En la cuntree herberga.
 La femme bisclavret le sot.
 228 Avenantment s'appareilot;
 El demain vait al rei parler,
 Riche present le fait porter.
 Quant Bisclavret la veit venir,
 232 Nuls hum nel poit retenir:
 Vers li curut cum enragiez.
 Oiez cum il est bien vengiez:
 Le neis li esracha del vis!
 236 Que li peüst il faire pis?
 De tutes parz l'unt manacié,
 Ja l'eüssent tut depescié,
 Quant uns sages hum dist al rei:
 240 "Sire, fet il, entent a mei!
 Ceste beste ad esté od vus.
 N'i ad ore celui de nus
 Ki ne l'eit veü lungement
 244 E pres de lui alé sovent:
 Unke mes humme ne tucha
 Ne felunie ne mustra,
 Fors a la dame qu'ici vei.
 248 Par cele fei ke jeo vus dei,
 Aukun curuz ad il vers li,
 E vers sun seigneur autresi.
 Ceo est la femme al chevalier
 252 Que taunt suliez avoir chier,
 Ki lung tens ad esté perduz,
 Ne seümes qu'est devenuz.
 Kar metez la dame en destreit,
 256 S'aucune chose vus direit
 Pur quei ceste beste la heit.
 Fetes li dire s'el le seit!
 Meinte merveille avum veüe,
 260 Ki en Bretaigne est avenue."
 Li reis ad sun conseil creü:
 Le chevalier ad retenu,
 D'autre part la dame ad prise
 264 E en mut grant destresce mise.
 Tant par destresce e par poür
 Tut la cunta de sun seignur;
 Coment ele l'avait trahi

where he'd first found the bisclavret.
 224 The animal was with him yet.
 The night of this return, the king
 took, in this countryside, lodging.
 And this the wife of Bisclavret
 228 well knew. Dressed fetchingly, she set
 out to have speech with him next day;
 rich gifts were part of her display.
 Bisclavret saw her come. No man
 232 had strength to hold him as he ran
 up to his wife in rage and fury.
 Hear of his vengeance! Hear the story!
 He tore her nose off, then and there.
 236 What worse could he have done to her?
 From all sides now, and full of threat
 men ran and would have killed him, but
 a wise man expeditiously
 240 spoke to the king. "Listen to me!
 He's been with you, this animal;
 there is not one man of us all
 who has not, long since, had to see
 244 and travel with him, frequently,
 and he has harmed no one, not once
 shown viciousness nor violence
 save just now, as you saw him do.
 248 And by the faith I owe to you,
 he has some bitter quarrel with her
 and with her husband, her seigneur.
 She was wife to that chevalier
 252 whom you so prized, and held so dear,
 who disappeared some time ago.
 What happened, no one seems to know.
 Put her to torture. She may state
 256 something, this dame, to indicate
 why the beast feels for her such hate.
 Force her to speak! She'll tell it straight.
 We've all known marvels, chanced to see
 260 strange events, here in Brittany."
 The King thought this advice was fair;
 and he detained the chevalier.
 The lady, too, he held; and she
 264 he put to pain and agony.
 Part out of pain, part out of fear,
 she made her former lord's case clear:
 how she had managed to betray

- 268 E sa despoille li toli,
 L'aventure qu'il li cunta,
 E que devint e u ala;
 Puis que ses dras li ot toluz;
 272 Ne fud en sun païs veüz.
 Tres bien quidot e bien creeit
 Que la beste Bisclavret seit.
 Li reis demande la despoille;
 276 U bel li seit u pas nel voille,
 Ariere la fet apporter,
 Al bisclavret la fist doner.

 Quant il l'urent devant lui mise,
 280 Ne s'en prist garde en nule guise.
 Li produm le rei apela,
 Cil ki primes le cunseilla:
 "Sire, ne fetes mie bien!
 284 Cist nel fereit pur nule rien,
 Que devant vus ses dras reveste
 Ne mut la semblance de beste.
 Ne savez mie que ceo munte:
 288 Mut durement en ad grant hunte!
 En tes chambres le fai mener
 E la despoille od lui porter;
 Une grant piece l'i laissums.
 292 S'il devient hum, bien le verums."
 Li reis meïsmes le mena
 E tuz les hus sur lui ferma.
 Al chief de piece i est alez
 296 Deus baruns ad od lui menez.
 En la chambrë entrent tuit trei;
 Sur le demeine lit al rei
 Truevent dormant le chevalier.
 300 Li reis le curut embracier;
 Plus de cent feiz l'acole e baise.
 Si tost cum il pot avoir aise,
 Tute sa tere li rendi;
 304 Plus li duna ke jeo ne di
 La femme ad del païs ostee

- 268 her lord, and take his clothes away;
 the story he had told to her,
 what he became, and how, and where;
 and how, when once his clothes were gone
 272 —stolen—he was not seen again.
 She gave her theory and her thought:
 Surely this beast was Bisclavret.
 These spoils, these clothes, the king demanded;
 276 whether she would or no, commanded
 that she go back and find them, get
 and give them to the bisclavret.

- When they were put in front of him
 280 he didn't seem to notice them.
 The king's wise man spoke up once more
 —the one who'd counselled him before—
 "Fair sire, this will not do at all!
 284 We can't expect this animal,
 in front of you, sire, to get dressed
 and change his semblance of a beast.
 You don't grasp what this means, my king!
 288 —or see his shame and suffering.
 Into your room have led this beast;
 with him, his clothes. Let him get dressed;
 For quite some time, leave him alone.
 292 If he's a man, that is soon known!"⁶
 The king himself led the bisclavret;
 and on him all the doors were shut.
 They waited. And then finally
 296 two barons, with the king, all three,
 entered. What a discovery!
 There on the king's bed, they could see
 asleep, the knight. How the king ran
 300 up to the bed, to embrace his man,
 kiss him, a hundred times and more!
 Quickly he acted to restore
 his lands, as soon as possible;
 304 more he bestowed than I can tell.
 His wife was banished. She was chased

6. The need for privacy can be seen, as Hanning and Ferrante suggest, as a sign of regaining the virtue of modesty and also of human dignity and propriety (104). But it is also true that in many ancient and medieval stories of the supernatural, the change from supernatural creature to human and vice versa, the crossing of the border between human reality and something else, can be shrouded and obscure. The most famous example is probably in *The Odyssey*, where Odysseus, after years of wandering in fantastic lands, is ferried home in a magic ship and put on shore in Ithaca, fast asleep all the while.

E chacie de la cuntree.
 Cil s'en alat ensemble od li
 308 Pur ki sun seignur ot trahi.

Enfanz en ad assez eü;
 Puis unt esté bien cuneti
 E del semblant e del visage:
 312 Plusurs des femmes del lignage,
 C'est veritez, senz nes sunt neies
 E sovent ierent esnasees.

L'aventure k'avez oïe
 316 Veraie fu, n'en dutez mie.
 De Bisclavret fu fez li lais
 Pur remembrance a tuz dis mais.

out of the country, and disgraced,
 and chased out, travelling with her,
 308 her mate and co-conspirator.

Quite a few children had this dame,
 who in their way achieved some fame
 for looks, for a distinctive face;
 312 numbers of women of her race
 —it's true—were born without a nose.
 Noseless they lived, the story goes.

And this same story you have heard
 316 truly occurred; don't doubt my word.
 I made this *lai* of Bisclavret
 so no one, ever, will forget.