

Love Tokens in the *Lai de l'Ombre*

Barry O'Neill

Center for International Security and Cooperation
Stanford University
barry.oneill@stanford.edu

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ABSTRACT: The thirteenth century poem, *Lai de l'Ombre*, or “lay of the shadow,” tells of a knight stricken with lovesickness for a married lady whom he has seen but never met. He visits her to persuade her to accept him as her lover, or at least to take his ring as a token. She refutes all his reasons, but just when she seems to have won the argument, he uses the ring to make a surprising move, showing her his courtly skill and capturing her love.

One question is why his move is so clever, but a broader one is why their dispute focuses on the ring. This paper presents a theory concerning the basis of love tokens such as rings, anniversary dinners or Valentine’s gifts. The basis of the theory is how one person’s emotion responds to the perception of a reciprocal emotion in another. One significance of the theory is that it combines the strategic and emotional aspects of action.

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The Lay of the Shadow, written in Old French about 1220 A.D., tells how a knight is smitten with a certain married lady, argues with her to persuade her to accept him, and, when it seems he has lost his case, how he pulls a clever trick, using her reflection, or “shadow,” on the surface of a well (Renart, Orr, ed., 1948; translated Goodrich, 1964, reproduced below in Appendix II.) The poet, who identifies himself in the final lines as “Jehan Renart,” crafted a delicate story that combines ideas of courtly love dialogues with a full plot as in the Breton lays, and to a lesser extent seduction tricks of the fabliaux.

The poem is an good candidate for a strategic study of plot. A remarkable aspect is the amount of direct discourse, as the couple debate whether she should accept him as a lover. At the start the author spends considerable lines on his own attitudes, but in the body of the poem he steps back to become like a sports commentator, letting us watch the action, interjecting what each of them is thinking in response to the other’s words, or explaining how, according to the rules of courtesy, one of them has just scored or lost a point. His commentary and the dialogue are mostly on short-term tactics, however. The raw description of the event is there, but not a full account of each disputant’s long-term plan, or of the structure of the whole situation.

Just what is happening in the poem is still controversial. The poet’s ambiguity regarding the lady’s feelings and motives has permitted scholars to argue for opposite interpretations, some suggesting that her protests are sincere, others that she wanted all along to become his lover and just had to put up a respectable fight. Similarly for the knight, although we know what he basically wants, the poet does not tell us his overall plan, and he can be seen either as a novice at love who learns his skill through dealing with her, or as a master who can teach us model behaviour as in the instructional dialogues of courtly love (e.g., Kay, 1980). If this interpretation were correct, which I doubt, the lesson would be one on what to do when your chosen one refuses your token.

This paper tries to fill in some larger strategic facts underneath the poem. It focuses especially on why the two should fight over accepting the ring, instead of, say, over engaging in the physical act. It will present a theory of love tokens, based on a concept of emotions as interacting epistemologically with each other. Each person’s emotion responds to his or her beliefs about the other’s. In a system like this there can be multiple self-consistent states for the two parties’ emotions, and this fact opens a role for a ring or some other social convention, to determine which state their beliefs and emotions go to. This approach is an example of how to address the general problem of constructing a theory of actions that combines strategic and emotional considerations.

Summary of the Lai de l’Ombre.

The poet begins by explaining his motives. I must not waste his skill in words in idleness or unworthy creations. Someone who weaves a beautiful and courtly story is more estimable than a king. Some will criticize me – let them – they are base fellows.

My story is of a knight in Lorraine who shone with all the virtues a knight should possess – not too talkative or haughty, generous and affable, fond of chess and hawking, and fierce in contests of arms. He had enjoyed love’s pleasures with many ladies but never bound himself to any of them. Love, therefore, took vengeance. It shot an arrow into him, “right through the body and up to the feathers.” The face of a certain married lady became engraved on his heart, and he gave up all other joys, dreaming only of her.

To relieve his suffering he decides to go to her and ask for pity. He recruits two companions and, concealing his purpose, rides up to her castle and steers the conversation into a proposal to drop in on her. As soon as he and the lady are alone he entreats her to accept him as her lover. At first she is taken aback, but then formulates her counterarguments: I cannot believe that a knight as courteous as yourself would be without a true love, and a skillful knight such as yourself would certainly be smooth at deluding ladies about his love. When I first came, he replied, didn’t your eyes and friendly welcome show your delight in seeing me? But my welcome followed the demands of honour, she said; men misconstrue simple manners – you’re doing that now - - you should not have set your sights on a goal you cannot attain – you were incautious. But did not Tristan, he replied, set to sea without a mast and trust in fortune to find Yseut. I cannot give you my love, she said, since I have a gallant husband of my own. But relieving my suffering would be as a charity as meritorious as a visit to the Holy Land; at least retain me by some token, a ring or a sash, as your knight, and later, if you will, accept me as your lover. I cannot let you walk the road to my heart when my heart is not on it, the lady replies.

He pleads that he will die otherwise. Somewhat moved by his arguments, and more convinced by his tears that he is sincere, she falls into her thoughts. At that point Love shows him a move that is subtle and pretty (but one that taxes the reader’s credence): he slips her ring off her finger, and replaces it with on his own. Before she notices, he summons his companions and rides off.

He leaves so abruptly that the lady decides he is fickle and is relieved not to have committed herself. Then she spies his ring on her finger. How did it get there? It was him. He must think he is my lover, and he will surely say so. She sends her valet to bring him back. She waits in her courtyard, planning to make him take the ring back, or else she will throw it into the well.

When the knight hears the valet’s summons he thinks he has won, but arriving back at the castle he is corrected. You have not acted chivalrously, she says, and you must take back your ring; I can not and will not keep it. I will not take it back, he says.

The lady makes a decisive move: I implore you upon the respect you owe me to take it back – do it if you value my love. The knight is caught between his own protestations of love and chivalry – either he leaves it with her and she will say he does not love her – every lover must do his ladies’ bidding -- or he takes it and loses her respect.

He accepts the ring, and the lady decides she has won. But, he adds, I will give it to the one I love next after you. He leans over the reflection of her face in the well, and drops in the ring. My lady does not want it, but her shadow will take it from me without any argument.

Such a display of talent, such courtliness in a man, was never seen since Adam's time, she thinks. How could I have held back for so long? They kiss at the well's edge, then skillfully play the game of hands. Other games would be played later. These lovers will face other difficulties as they come, says the poet, but as I, Jean Renart, have nothing more to say, it is time for me to turn my thoughts elsewhere. Here ends the lay of the shadow.

THE CLEVERNESS OF THE KNIGHT'S WINNING MOVE

Why did tossing the ring into the well succeed so brilliantly? It won her over as a demonstration of his skill, according to the narrative of her thoughts, but just what constituted its cleverness? This is the first question to address, but it is not the main one dealt with here. It is preparation to analyze the logic of exchanging a love token like a ring.

The worth of the knight's move must be understood within the poem's assumption of ideal courtly love. Courtly love principles include lovesickness as a virtue, fine speech as a valued skill to win over the beloved, obedience to one's lady, love as a source of valor, sex as a joy and expression of love but not a necessary condition, and often, at least in literature, secret liaisons and adultery. It is not clear that Renart is fully serious about all of this – his superlatives over the qualities of the knight and the lady and his humorous asides suggest he finds the conventions amusing even as a literary framework, but the rules would be well known to his readers so we must interpret the poem within them.

A central element of courtly love is refined speech and the ability to exploit it in gaining the love of one's chosen (Benson, 1984). The knight is well spoken, but no more so than the lady, and she beats him repeatedly on logic. He makes up some ground by interspersing his arguments with praise, and he scores some points with shows of emotions: tears spring and crimson blotches appear across his face. But when words run out, he turns to deeds, first, slipping the ring on her finger and then throwing it in the well. Since these win him the prize, the plot might be seen as a counterexample to pure courtly love, a claim that manly deeds trump words, but that would be mistaken. The first, losing, move of slipping the ring on her finger does not show the persuasive talent of a courtly lover, but the winning move of the well is more a communication than an action. When the trio of knights approached the castle, they banter as if they were about to storm it in battle. The knight's stealthy trick is a warrior's act, a move to change the situation directly, rather than persuade. Although we are told it was inspired by Love, fails and we cannot understand why he put any confidence in it. It seems almost an act of force and, as she says, unchivalrous. However, throwing the ring into the well, was action and communication both. He showed that his skill in actions and words.

It was also clever for its intricate symbolism. If he cannot have her, her shadow means more to him than any other woman. If the woman in the well could unlock the gate, the knight says, she would come up and thank me for giving her a ring which has been on your finger.

The move was sound psychology. According to a body of research on decision behaviour, we appreciate things more when we are about to lose them, than when we have the prospect of gaining them (Kahnemann, Knetsch and Thaler, 1991). Having excited some affection in her, the knight let her know how it would feel to lose him.

The strongest reason for the move's success is its clear demonstration that he had outwitted her. Even had there been no symbolism of the reflection, the tactic would have been a good move as it avoided what to the lady had seemed like a solid trap. The knight wandered into difficulty when he made the issue whether she would take his ring. When she told him to take it back if he loved her, perhaps he wished the ring would have never been involved. Moreover, his insistence on the ring added a problem for her – how could she wear it as a married lady? Either taking it or leaving it with her, he would lose his case. But he found a third option by eliminating his ring and his dilemma.

It was not just his success in solving the problem that impressed her so, but the cleverness of his particular solution. As the visit progressed, the assumption became that he cannot have her if he cannot outwit her. But he clearly outwitted her in his final trick since it was one that she too might have foreseen and avoided, but did not. She had planned to throw the ring in the well herself, but did not realize that he might do that and escape her trap. Her inadvertence is underlined by the fact that she set up the situation herself – it was she who suggested they sit by the well. Like a debater who turns the opponent's own point against him, the knight cleverly took advantage of what she handed him.

This account seems satisfactory – his action was bona fide clever, and clever in several ways. However, the deeper question must be addressed: why should the decision turn on the ring. The argument started around her mercy and charity, marital fidelity, and his merits, all pertinent considerations. How did these issues get replaced by the struggle to get him to take back the ring?

THE ROLE OF THE RING: INTERACTIVE EMOTIONS AND LOVE TOKENS

The knight's bleakest moments but final success came when the issue turned to whether she would accept his ring. A ring is a "token of love," but what does this mean? When he became stubborn, why did the lady not say, "I'll keep your ring, but I can tell you that it means nothing to me." Somehow her act of taking it would speak more convincingly than the opposite words she could say to him. A further puzzle is her calling him back to the castle. She would not simply discard the ring, but for some reason wanted to give it to him. Her rationale, that he might advertise around that she is his love, does not seem convincing. Surely a ring put on her finger under those circumstances cannot be taken

for that meaning, at least by an honest suitor. And if he is not honorable, there is nothing she can do to control his boasting? Further, she wants him not only to take it back but to acknowledge that to her.

The ring is a typical of a large class of items given or exchanged by lovers – gifts, cards, locks of hair in lockets, matching tattoos. The use of a token carries an importance in the relationship beyond any objective good the object might do or value it might have. Why should this be so? One typical answer would be that they are endowed with emotional or symbolic meaning by the parties. True as this is, from a strategic point of view, the explanation is incomplete. Why are they given this meaning? What motivates people who sacrifice other values for these purposes? Valentine's Day may be a creation of greeting card companies, but to ignore it is a mortal sin. Why should partners whose mutual happiness depends on each other's real personal virtues, fall into disagreements over superficial matters?

The following theory is meant to integrate the strategic and emotional aspects of tokens. It is stated here in general terms, in the sense that it is not a theory of the *Lai de l'Ombre* in particular. The poem is more complex and its clarification from this viewpoint will come later.

The first step is to note that one's emotion towards another often depends on one's perception of the reciprocal emotion in another. If I am told someone is angry with me, I may feel more angry at them for knowing that. Other factors kept constant – such as my opinion of their true merit – my knowledge of their anger increases my own feeling. Embarrassment is another example (Schelling, n.d.). As two people interact some event may occur that one finds embarrassing, and that person may show it. This may induce embarrassment in the second, which feeds back to the first and so on, in a spiral. Other emotions might involve negative feedback – I may be less ashamed of myself if I am in the presence of someone who is also ashamed. Trust is on the border of emotions and can show the pattern too, as can sorrow. (The interaction is not just between A's belief about B's emotion and A's consequent emotion. Higher order beliefs matter too. If I think that you are more angry because I am angry, that can make me all the more angry.)

Love is plausibly an interacting emotion. I may love someone, but knowing they love me, all other knowledge about them held constant, may increase my love for them.

The dynamics can be seen in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 shows A's emotion as a function of A's perception of B's emotions. Various curves could be drawn, including ones that decrease, but I have assumed the function is increasing and S-shaped. To see the result of interaction we construct two curves like Figure 1, for each of A and B. These are joined in a single diagram, with B's function plotted sideways so that B's perception of A is on the vertical axis, and B's resultant emotion is horizontal. The reason for doing this is that it lets us chart mutual reactions easily. For example suppose for some reason A gets the idea that B has a higher value; then A will respond as shown by the vertical line. If we assume that generally each perceives the other's emotion correctly, and if we also assume that they note each other's emotions in a back-and-forth sequence, we can determine B's

response by considering that very curve, using the value determined for A as a starting point.

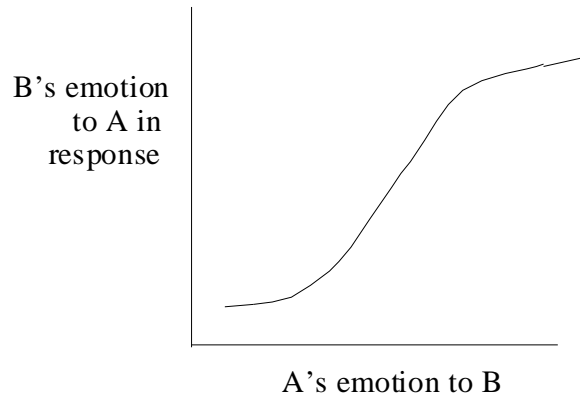


Figure 1: A possible emotional response function

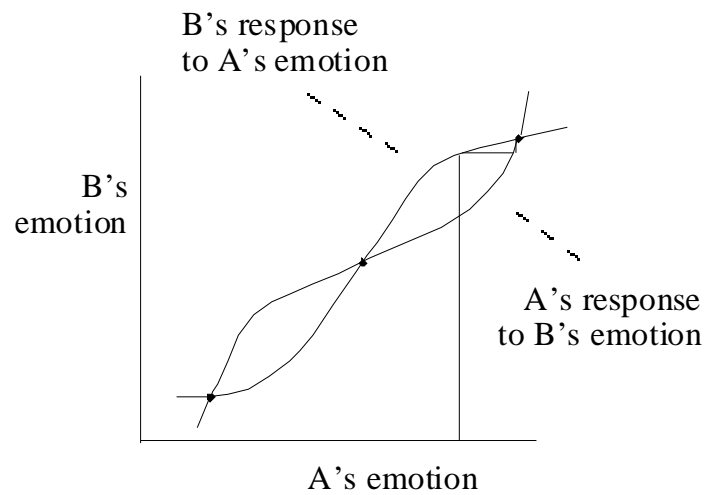


Figure 2. Two parties' emotional response functions, plotted

to calculate the three equilibria.

It is important to understand just what claims are not being made here. I am not saying that A's love is determined only by B's love. Of course it is determined by many factors. The diagram applies only with the assumption that these others are held constant. It is not saying that everyone's emotional responses take this functional form. Many people seem to love other's less the more they are loved. The claim is only that this is a wide pattern, common enough for the convention of tokens to arise. Also, the analysis cannot be accused of "reducing" love to rationality or numbers. There is nothing irrational or rational going on in these diagrams; they are only summaries of the involuntary responses of one person's emotions to another's. Nor do the diagrams require that love be measured at least not on anything more than an ordinal scale.

The assumption of accurate perceptions of each other's emotions is important here. It is often incorrect, but that complexity can be handled after the basic theory is laid out. If we restrict ourselves to such situations, we can look for equilibria -- pairs of emotional levels, one for each party, such that neither changes its intensity given its knowledge of the other's intensity. For the curves we have drawn, there are three such pairs, indicated by dots. The middle is unlikely to hold however. It is unstable in the sense that a slight deviation from its exact value will send players to the upper or lower one.

Thus the players have two possible intensities of mutual love: high and low. A crucial point is that there is no consideration to choose between these states, except knowledge of the other's love. One's partner's personal merits or one's own are the same at the high or low equilibria; the determining factor is the circular and self-referential one, that each one loves the other more intensely if the feeling is reciprocated.

Given that no objective consideration chooses between these two values, that role is opened for social conventions. If some event happens that triggers a switch from the low to high equilibrium, it may be quite unconnected with the person's intrinsic lovability. The important factor is circular: that the players know it will trigger a switch in each other. Love tokens are these social conventions, helping to steer mutual beliefs to the higher equilibrium.

An partial analogy would Schelling's famous problem of two parties who have arranged when to meet in New York City, but forgotten to say where. It has some similarity to the issue here, although important differences. They must choose a common place without communication. Most of those whom Schelling interviewed would head for the clock in the middle of Grand Central. The problem of tacitly coordinating on a place is solved in an essentially arbitrary way, perhaps by the clock's being in the center of a central place. It could just as well have been the base of the Empire State Building, or the front of the Library. If one asks the question for different cities, putting it to natives of those cities, they can usually coordinate on a place. However there is no broad rule for saying where to go across cities. One place or another "stands out" and solves the game based on cultural knowledge.

Note that while Schelling's idea has some similarities with emotional interaction, there are also differences. His players adopt beliefs about the other's beliefs, consequently beliefs about where the other will go, and then in turn about where they themselves should go. Ours adopt beliefs about the other's emotions, perhaps based on the other's beliefs about their own emotions, and then react in their feelings. They make no moves. His equilibrium involves consistency of beliefs and moves, this one of beliefs and emotions.

RINGS AS LOVE TOKENS IN THE CHILD BALLADS

The ring token in the *Lai* is embedded in a complex story, so it is hard to separate out the parts that are essential features of the token from those connected with other parts of the plot. For example, a ring is a publicly observable adornment, so is the issue here really what everyone else will think? This is not the point of our theory, that makes the token essentially a event between the lovers. We wish to get a wider sample of rings as love tokens, to see if some of the statements implied by the theory are generally plausible. The English and Scottish popular ballads, known as the Child ballads after their cataloguer and editor, Harvard professor Francis James Child, are a good source (Child, 1883-1898). They are a literary form generally later than the *Lai de l'Ombre*, at least in their written sources (the earliest Child ballad, *Judas*, was written down perhaps 100 years later), and they are folklore of a wider group of people, including the peasant and lower classes. They are less genteel; violence and revenge are the companions of love, not refined speech. However, they include many themes from courtly love, including lovesickness up to dying for love and chivalrous behaviour.

The Child ballads are full of rings. Of the 305 ballads total, no less than 68 have versions in which a finger ring appears. The rings have the following functions:

- as money or a commodity – to bribe a porter or a jailor, or as a bribe for sex, or they are stolen or left as bequests;
- as a sign of richness or gentility – you could not see her fingers they were so covered with rings;
- as magical protection – to prevent or heal wounds;
- as love or courting gifts – apparently without an assumption of a relationship;
- as marriage tokens – he marries her “with ring”;
- as identification – someone is recognized by their ring, including several instances of sealing letters;
- miscellaneous – what is rounder than a ring? -- the world;
- love tokens.

The category of love tokens contains 18 examples, and these can be divided into subtypes, although some ballads fall in more than one subtype and some in none:

- (1) A ring that reflects the state of the relationship, often magically – pale and wan, broken in two by the lovers, burst in two themselves, fallen off;
- (2) One or two exchanged rings that reflect the quality of the person's love, tin vs. gold; a gold ring in exchanged for a gift of mere food;

- (3) A ring used as a reminder of the relationship, especially when lovers are separated;
- (4) A ring as one of a series of symbolic gifts around the relationship – a lock of hair, an article of clothing, a penknife.

Two aspects of this list are notably consistent with our theory. Rings sent as reminders of the relationship between two separated lovers, item (3), can be seen as saying, “we both know we love each other.” This is the essence of the emotional interaction theory. The fewer number of ballads in category (2) in which there are two rings, like *Lord Gregory*, where one is gold and the other tin to represent true and false love, are not consistent with the theory and would have to be explained otherwise.

Second, rings are most often private exchanges. Although they are worn on the finger and could be public, a function reflected in the many ballads involving identification by rings, in most of the love token examples they are private communication between the two lovers. The parties in the *Lai de l’Ombre* constantly worry about their reputation, whether their actions would be judged right by others, but third parties are not at all necessary features of rings as love tokens, judging by this further data.

EMOTIONAL INTERACTION, LOVE TOKENS AND THE LAI DE L’OMBRE

The last section treated one difference between the *Lai* and the emotional interaction theory: that in the former parties worried not just about what each other thought but about the rest of the world’s view. The counterargument from ballads is that both private and public communication was going on, and the theory accounts for the former. There are three other differences between the pure theory of emotional interactions outlined above and the *Lai*.

First, in the *Lai* the parties make moves, whereas in the theory they just observe each other’s emotions and their feelings change. This is easy to fit into our framework. Up to now there was no suggestion that people preferred one equilibrium over the other, but they clearly do have such tastes. They would rather be less embarrassed, and probably prefer not to be angry, although not always. As for love, whether they would like to be at the high or low equilibrium is variable. The lady prefers the low one since he is a stranger and she is married, but he prefers high. It is straightforward to extend the analysis so that he will propose a love token and she will reject it, and then the act of acceptance or not determines an equilibrium.

A second difference is that we have assumed that each person knows the other’s emotions. In the *Lai*, this is not so. The knight spends many words trying to convince her that he is sincere and the lady spends much thought judging if that is true. This uncertainty complicates the analysis but again there is nothing in principle new or difficult about a player responding to his or her estimate of the other’s emotion, rather than to its known value.

The third difference is that the lady is unsure not only of the knight's level of love, but of his entire emotional reaction function. Perhaps he is completely false, corresponding to a flat line at zero in Figure 1. The reader has knowledge of his true state of mind, and tends to believe his function is flat but high, that he will continue to love her intensely whether or not she reciprocates. Again, the analysis is complicated but, I believe, straightforward. Whatever particular type the knight may be, his actions have to deal with the lady's beliefs, what she thinks is possible. The poet lets us know that the knight is unsurpassed in all the virtues, and given that a religious obsession with love is considered a virtue in this genre, he is an unmitigated lover. But the lady does not know this. It is reasonable for her to think that he might have a responsive reaction function as in the Figure.

CONCLUSION

The problem of combining game and decision theory with broader theories of human action is important but understudied. Most applications, especially those in economics, choose problems where culture or emotions are less involved, or in any case depict the problems in that way. Certain approaches have been proposed (reviewed in O'Neill, 2000), but the notion of emotional interactions is interesting because it is somewhat parallel to the interactions of decisions found in the standard theory. To some extent it clarifies the poem, but perhaps more applies to the general problem of how apparently arbitrary cultural conventions influence beliefs and actions.

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APPENDIX I: Child ballads in which rings appear as love tokens.

#17 Hind Horn. She gives him a ring that turns pale if she is to be wed to another. After many years of separating, he sees it grow pale, and travels to interrupt the wedding. He drops the ring into a goblet to identify himself.

#92 Bonny Bee Hom. She gives him a ring that turns pale and wan if his love is dead or untrue.

#76 The Lass of Roch Royal. The lovers exchange gifts at wine. Her ring is gold and true, his is tin and false.

#93 Lamkin. While a lord is in London, his lady is murdered in the castle. His rings split in two, or fall off.

#53 Young Beichan (Version E) Before the lovers part, she breaks a ring in two, giving him half.

#96 The Gay Gossy Hawk. The bird brings a letter to his love, she sends back a ring and a garland of her hair.

#252 The Kitchie Boy. She gives him a ring before he sets off; in the new land he refuses to change it for a rich lady's ring; he comes back and identifies himself with the ring.

#101 William o' Douglas Dale. Willie dreams Queen Oliphant has given him a ring and a red rose. She has had the same dream and they act on it.

#131 Robin Hood and the Ranger. Robin gives the ranger a ring "as a token of love" for his brave fighting.

#5 Gil Brenton. After embracing a lady, he gives her a lock of hair, a bead bracelet, a ring and a penknife

#33 Kempy Kay. Two monsters court, he gives her a tin ring.

#65 Lady Maisry. She sends a ring to her English lover to summon him to save her from burning.

#83 Childe Maurice. He sends the queen a ring and a mantle and a message to meet him in the woods. Her husband finds out and kills him, but it turns out he was her son – a ring as identification is mistaken for a love token.

#195. Lord Maxwell's Last Goodnight. He gives a ring to his love as he takes a sea voyage so she will remember him.

#295 The Brown Girl. He rejects her because she is brown. He changes his mind, but she comes to his bedside and disdainfully gives him back his ring.

#208 Lord Derwentwater. He says farewell to his wife and goes to face the king. He will be executed. On the way his ring falls from his finger.

#200. Johnny Faa, or the Gypsy Laddy. The gypsies come to the castle and give the lady meat and ginger. She gives them her ring, and leaves with them.

APPENDIX II. The Lay of a Shadow by Jean Renart, c. 1220, translated by Norma Goodrich, *The Ways of Love: Eleven Romances of Medieval France*, Beacon Press, 1964.

Three comments on the translation: She mixes high language and colloquialisms, just as the poet does.; the kite referred in the second paragraph was a bird, the central symbol in the romance *L'Escoufle* believed also to be by Jean Renart; the French passages are from a slightly different version than the one she translated.

*Ne me veil pas desañser
De bien dirN, ainz veil user
Mon sens en el quNestre oiseus
Je ne veil pas resemble cues
Qui sont garHon por tout destruire,
Mes, puis que j'e le sens d'estruire
Aucun bien en dit et en fet
Vilains est qui ses gas en fet,
Qant ma cortoisie s'aoevre
A dire aucune plesant oeuvre
Ou il n'a rampone ne lait . . .*

I cannot let my skill in words fall into disuse. Instead, let me use my skill rather than disabuse it in idleness. I have no desire to resemble those who are good at destruction: since I have a taste for construction and can create something worthy in either language or plot, I shall consider those who ridicule me as low fellows. Only my sense of what courtesy is urges me to write a pleasant work where there is neither spite nor ugliness. And even if some critic were to use his language backwards and forwards, which is as it may be, no more than I could make this finger as long as that one, no more could he turn a scoundrel like himself into a good man.

It is better to have been born under a lucky star than to have such men as friends, and I've said that before.

According to William's example – you remember how in the story he cut the kite into pieces and burned them – you can be sure I'm telling you a truth when I say that a man is better off to have been born with talent even than to have friends. A friend dies and one is too often powerless to keep a friend if one does not watch out or if he falls under the influence of a fool. But a person who wastes his words and squanders his riches and afterwards accuses Folly because he spent extravagantly, if when the move has been made, if he puts aside the follies he has committed, and if his bad luck runs out, then his lucky star will twinkle on him again.

That is why I made my present decision. I wish to use my skill in words in telling you a good story and in modulating it to the loftiness of my material. Great, indeed, is my delight

as an author when my hard work has succeeded in creating a thing of beauty, such as a romance put into rhyme.

Someone has said: He who rows well and rhymes well, he who pulls safely to shore from the deep ocean, he who arrives fairly at the port of literature, is more to be esteemed than kings and counts. So in due time you shall hear this story I will tell you, if boredom does not meanwhile descend upon us both, this lay I shall make of a shadow.

I tell you there was once a knight from the outer marches of the Empire of Lorraine and Germany. I don't suppose one such remains today from Ch>lons to Perthois who unites in his person such an array of fine qualities as he did. In many respects he resembled Sir Gawain, the son of Lot, as we know. However, we never heard his name. I don't even know if he had one. In any case, he did have prowess and courteousness as his proper domains. All who were acquainted with him marveled at the rich train of life he led. You would have found that he was neither too talkative nor too haughty, nor at all boorish. Although he wasn't a particularly wealthy man, he did know how to live handsomely with what he had. He knew how to take the surplus from one place to cover the scarcity of another. Neither lady nor damsel ever heard tell of him without liking what they heard and even bearing him a certain affection, but he took none of them seriously. It was not that he was not desired, for in every respect he was open and charming and gallant. When persons wanted his company, they were welcome and more than welcome as his guests.

However, when it came to contests of arms, then he was quite another man from the one I have been describing. Proud and defiant and daring whenever he wore a helmet on his head, he knew how to ride down the files of mounted and visored knights and challenge them to break a lance with him. He insisted upon two jousts every holy day. Among all other brave knights there was not one so devoted to armed contests as he was, nor was he a man to wear his summer finery in winter. With gifts and furs he was generous to a fault, bestowing lavishly more than any two other knights.

Every day he liked to have five or so friends about him, nor did he ever have a thing in his hands that someone else coveted without his immediately offering it to him. He also enjoyed hawking when he was in the mood. I don't dislike it, either. He knew how to play chess and how to skirmish and to play all sorts of other "games" even better than Tristran. For a long time he lived such a carefree life that he was beloved by many people. In body and motions he was handsome and light and quick. Perhaps he was actually more a valiant than a really pretty man. In short, he was everything a knight should be.

Then Love, which makes itself master or mistress of all she surveys, at this opportune moment in his life ran him through. Love wanted to exact tribute from him for all the pleasure he had so far lightly enjoyed in his life. Although he had delighted many a lady in his days, he had never bound himself in either service or homage and still did not do so since he never had recognized his state as a lover within Love's harsh bailiwick. Hence Love, in due time and due place, let him feel her might.

Even Tristan, who once cut off his hair and dressed as a jester for the sake of Yseut, never felt a third of the lovesickness this knight felt for her upon whom his recovery depended. Love shot an arrow into him, right through the body and up to the feathers. Then the great beauty and the lovely name of a certain married lady were engraved by Love in his heart. Then he naturally put far away all the other women he had known. His heart had been involved in many pastimes without doting upon any of them. From that moment he saw that he could put their various attractions all together in order to serve her who seemed to him the priceless ruby among all beauties.

The perceptiveness, the nobility, and the great gentleness of her glowing face were, to the best of my knowledge, before his eyes both day and night. There was no longer any joy that didn't bore him except only the joy alone of thinking of her. Love, who knew him well, had set such a perfect trap for him that he said he had never seen such a thing as lovely as this woman was, and he was ready to go bond for it.

“Ah!” he said, “I have thus far been so miserly with my love and so clever at avoiding danger! Now God wishes those who bestowed their love on me, those whom I did not love, to be avenged. I have certainly misjudged all those men whom I have seen surprised by Love. Now I have been reduced to the same condition. Love wants me to feel her power. There never was a poor devil sitting in the barber's chair to have his teeth pulled who felt more anguish than I do.”

That is the sort of thing he thought and said when he was alone, for truly he was no longer his own master. No man before had ever been placed in a more cruel torment than that in which Love had set him.

“Alas!” he said, “since I am in love with her, what will happen if she is never in love with me? That I don't know, nor do I see how I can live a day longer. Delight from going or from staying cannot relieve my heart nor bring solace. There is nothing else to do but to cultivate the friendship of those who ordinarily go where she is; by so doing many have had joy and relief for their love. If only she would make a chain with her two arms about my neck! All night long I imagine that she kisses me and that she is holding me and that her arms are close about me. Our awakening in the morning unkisses me from my delight. Then I hunt for her in my bed and feel for her beautiful body which sets me on fire and binds me to its spell.” (But, alas, he who cannot find, cannot take. It has happened to me and has happened many a time to many another man.)

“Well, it cannot be otherwise. I shall have to go to her or send her entreaties, since it cannot be otherwise. I shall ask her to take pity finally on my distress, ask that from her great gentleness she save my life and my mind. There would be one less of hers if she allowed me to perish. By all good right only kindness should flow from her heart, only pity from her eyes.

“Upon reflection, it occurs to me that it would be better for me to go to her than to send her messages. They say, “There's nothing like action” that so becomes a man. They used to say

in the old days that experience and suffering are two very good teachers. Since I have managed to appeal to my own reason, the only thing to do is to go directly to her and say frankly that she has imprisoned my heart which never before knew love and that it has no desire to escape, so sad it is. Gentleness, pity and generosity ought to be able to move her.”

To move her, he outfitted himself and two of his companions – no more. I don’t know what more I should tell you than that he mounted, with up to six valets. He cantered along, happy and pensive in his thoughts and on his way. He took care to mislead his companions as to the reason for his journey and to throw them off the track of his thoughts. He told them that he was just going for a gay ride. Thus he buried his anxiety under a carefree appearance so well that they all came without suspicion up to the porter’s lodge at the entrance to the castle.

“See how pleasantly that castle is situated!” he remarked. He didn’t say it so much for the moats and the walls to which he pointed but only to see if by some lucky chance his men would speak of the beautiful lady he was going to see.

“You ought to be ashamed,” said they, “for you have acted badly in that you mentioned the castle first instead of first mentioning that lady who everyone says is the most courteous and the most beautiful in the realm.

“Oh, on guard,” said they, “for if she knew what an error you have made, it would be better for you to have been captured by the Turks and taken to Cairo.”

With a smile he said, “Oh, Sirs, in God’s name, treat me kindly. Don’t handle me so roughly. I haven’t quite deserved to die. There’s not a city nor a castle that I more desire than this one. I’d go to Saladin’s prison for five years or six if I were guaranteed that it would be mine, seated just as it is.”

“And what about what’s inside its walls?” they asked. “Would that be too much to the bargain?” All this time they didn’t even understand what sophistry he was leading them into saying. The good knight was only talking to hear what they would say. He asked them if they wanted to call. “What else would we do?” they replied. “Knights ought never to pass by a road or a highway where a lady dwells without stopping to see her.”

He said, “I shall abide by your wishes, and if you advise and wish that we go, then that is reason enough.”

Then each pulled on his steed’s reins and turned them towards the gateway, crying: “For the ladies, a party of knights!” (For such an enterprise, such a refrain.)

They spurred their horses dashingly up to the citadel. They had already passed the moat and the first wall. The lord had draped his cloak across one shoulder, with the collar against his cheek. He wore an ermined surcoat made of very shiny scarlet silk with bands of squirrel. As for the others, they wore pleated white shirts, hats trimmed with periwinkle blossoms and spurs of burnished gold. I can’t imagine how any one could be more pleasingly clad for a summer’s day.

They didn't pull up their horses until they had clattered up to the staircase of honor that led to the great hall. Every valet in the castle had heard the commotion and run to the balconies. The seneschal of the household saw the knights dismounting in the courtyard. From the office where he was, he ran to tell the lady the news – that certain knights, whom she knew only by hearsay, had come to pay her a visit.

The lady became crimson, not with anger, but because this visit was so unexpected. She stood up on her crimson carpet, and there she stood full height, this lady of great beauty. Her maidens threw about her shoulders a mantle of white samite, which enhanced the great beauty that was hers by nature. She had intended to go down to greet the knights, but they were so quick to mount the staircase that they were already in the chamber before she could leave it. By the glad face she showed them, they knew they were welcome. The knights were delighted that she honored them by advancing even a few steps, instead of waiting for them to cross the room to her.

The courteous and high-born lady wore over her gown a loose and diaphanous white tunic with a train that floated six feet behind her on the fine rushes of the floor.

“Sir,” she said to the knight, “you are very welcome and your companions also.” She bore herself like a person who has every day a good-day on her lips and who is every bit worthy of having one. The companions had spoken the truth when they said she was no lady whose house should be bypassed. As they bowed low and returned her greeting, all three were under the spell of her beauty.

Laughing softly, the lady took the knight by the hand and led him to a seat. Then he had what he so long desired, when he sat by her side. Fortunately, the knight's companions were well-mannered and sophisticated. Instead of making the conversation general, they sat, with two of the lady's attendants, on a large chest studded with brass. Because they were enchanted by their own damsels who chatted easily with them, the companion knights gave no thought to their master and hostess.

One her side of the chamber the lady, by the wit and grace of her words, taught the knight how very courteous and intelligent she really was. He leaned towards her so that his face was so close he could admire the beauty of her eyes. He called mutely upon her eyes to bear witness to his heart's predicament – since it was utterly hers – so that she could see that from the instant he had promised it to her, he had not done so falsely.

“Very lovely, very sweet, most beloved Lady,” he said, the power of your heart has cast and thrown far out of myself all thoughts other than thoughts of you. I come, therefore, before you today to lay at your feet my strength and my power inasmuch as I possess either. I come to learn if I shall ever have any joy; for truly there is no one and no thing I love so much as I love you. If the all-knowing God lets me come into His grace, to know this have I come here today, as I wish you to realize that you are the mistress of my person. And may gentleness and pity overcome your heart. For a man who would say prayers in a minster would do well to pray for those who understand nothing of love or who know not how to be a loyal love.”

“Why, sir, upon my soul,” she said, “what have you said?”

“So God lets me live until Saint Denis’s day, Lady, I have only said the truth. You and you along have power over me, and that more than any woman alive.”

The lady blushed flame-red to hear him confess his love, and even redder when he swore he was hers alone. After awhile she said most sensibly, “Certainly, sir, I cannot believe that such a chivalrous knight as yourself is without a true love, as you say. Nor would anyone else believe it either. Your stock would fall everywhere. You would be esteemed much lower than at present you are esteemed. Such a handsome man in every respect – in arms and hands and body and everything else – would certainly know by word and by glance how to pull the wool over my eyes and make me take for the truth what I don’t want to take.”

Thus right from the outset she succeeded by her words in casting serious doubt on his protestations, as he who taught me this story explained. He suffered at having been brought up short when he swore there was no one he loved so much. If any other but her had implied he was a liar, he would have taken a quick revenge; however, he was on such ticklish ground that he still did not dare contradict her.

Instead, he spoke sensibly, “Oh, Lady, have mercy on me. Take pity. Without feint, love of you made me discover for the first time the lovesickness I feel. Your speech and your lovely eyes hardly harmonize with what you say now. They greeted me more pleasantly a few minutes ago when I came – and more warmly. And know for sure that when they welcomed me, that was true courtesy. But when your eyes first caught sight of me, they saw nothing, and that’s the long and short of it, unless you wish to take me as your man, for that – without deceit – I desire to be. Sweet Lady, out of your gentleness, may it please you to so ordain!

“Retain me as your knight as of now – and when you will, as your love. For the past year and a half you have put me under your spell, you have made me so true to arms or to my household, and you have charmed me so that the name of love, God willing, will never be refused me.”

“It does you great good,” she said afterwards, “for you to think you have this position. I meant nothing by my glances except courtesy and respect. But I must say it grieves me that you have interpreted them as light. If I had not welcomed you courteously, that would have been very dishonorable of me. It is a silly thing that we ladies are so unseeing. When we think we are fulfilling the obligations of chivalry and the requirements of good manners, men think entirely otherwise – that they have advanced their own suits.

“My experience with you today has done nothing if not prove it. You drew this same conclusion. You should have done better to hold up a net for pigeons, for, were the years as long as you say and the halves like three full ones, you would never know well enough how to wangle – not for anything you knew how to do – me into being as gallant in my behavior to you as you begged me to be. A man should be more cautious, before he sets his net, about what he is doing.”

Then the knight could not see what, by word or by deed, he was going to do or to become. “At least, Lady,” he began, “I cannot deny what I have been. There is pity and kindness in you, and never doubt it. They never failed us. A lady truly beloved never failed in the end to take pity on her lover. So I have put out to sea, like Tristran, without a mast. Just as I was for a long time master of my own ship and just as I steered my own course, if I do not receive your forgiveness today, I shall never consider any other failure a sorrow when I shall have escaped from this one. My heart, which set itself upon you without so much as your leave, can sue for no other redress.”

“Oh, really,” she said with laugh, “I never heard anything like this! Well, you may remain here a little longer. I am convinced that what you say is not entirely wind. And yet, by Saint Nicholas, I first thought you were joking.”

“In God’s name, even if you were the lowest little harlot, most honored and beautiful and gentle Lady, I should not have known how to joke about such a matter.” Nothing he could say in words, no promise he could make her, would advance his suit in the least. He would never be granted any favors that way. He couldn’t think how to move her.

A flush of crimson spread over he face. His eyes filled with tears. The skin of his face was splotched, here white and here crimson. The lady could not help but notice that he had not been misrepresenting his heart’s intent. She also knew that men’s confusion did not always necessarily arise from their defenseless hearts. Of course, it was in his favor that he let the lady see his tears at that time. She had not thought he could be so distressed.

“Sir,” she said, “by God, it is not right that I give my love to you or to any other man when I have my own lord and gallant knight husband who does me homage very well and pays me every honor.”

“Oh, Lady,” he said, “of course he does! On my word, he must be a very happy man! But if gentleness and pity and sincerity ever made you feel affection for me, no one who reads of sings of love would hold you any lower because of it. Thus you would be loving me only by doing honor to the customs of our century. You could compare the alms you would thus so bestow to the worth of a voyage to the Holy Land.”

“Now you are wishing me away from you,” she said. “No. It would be wrong of me. I cannot suffer nor allow my heart to be so pledged to you in any manner. Now since your prayers are bootless, I beg you to desist.”

“Oh!” he cried. “Now you have struck me dead, Lady. Please stop. Do not say more for any reason at all. Instead treat me courteously and kindly. Retain me in your service by some jewel or some sash or some ring, where you will accept one from me in exchange. And I assure you that there will be nothing a knight could do for a lady, even, so help me God, if I were to lose my soul, that I would not do for you.

“Your green eyes and your bright face can rule me so effortlessly. I am entirely – just as I am – under your dangerous spell.”

“Sir,” she replied, “I don’t care to have the reputation without the advantage. I am perfectly well aware of the fact that you are everywhere considered chivalrous; that reputation has been generally acceded to you for some time now. I would be very disillusioned if I allowed you to walk the road to my heart when I knew all along that my heart was not on it. That would be an ugly way for me to behave. It is a great sign of courtesy for whoever can to avoid censure.”

“Everything you say only shows that you must want to help me, Lady,” he said, “If you were to let me die because you wouldn’t love me, then that would be a blot on your name, if that lovely face of yours, so full of frankness, were to commit homicide. In any case, we must come to some conclusion soon. Lady of beauty, so endowed with all earthly good, in God’s name, look to it!”

His polite and pleasant words caused the lady to fall to the point of wanting to hear his pleas. She did feel sorry for him, for she no longer believed that his sighs and the tears he shed were insincere. From that moment she told herself that Love perforce must be tormenting him sorely. It must be Love, which forced him to do what he was doing. She also realized that if she were to take a lover, she never could find another so chivalrous as this knight. She still could not help but wonder at all those things he had said and which no one but him had ever said to her before – not ever before that very day. Along with this thought, or rather contrary to it, came another line of reasoning: she should keep from committing herself to something she might later have occasion to repent.

While he was in great pain to know what she was thinking and into what part of her thoughts he had wandered, Love showed him a very pretty way to make a subtle and gallant move. In so many other difficult situations has Love shown his wisdom and his concern for those he has embarked.

While the gentle lady sat lost in her thoughts, the knight carefully slipped her ring from her finger and promptly replaced it with his. By this quick thinking he was to do something very advantageous. Then he interrupted her thoughts so completely that she was not able immediately to concern herself for the ring on her finger. Before she even had time to look down he rose and said loudly, “Lady, give me your leave to depart. Know henceforth that my services and my self are both at your command.”

He almost ran across the hall and down the steps taking both his companions along with him. No one but him understood the motive behind this sudden departure. Sighing and pensive, he walked across the courtyard to his horse and mounted.

She whom he had most wanted to convince of the joys of love was suddenly left alone. “Has he really gone away? What sort of manners is this? No knight ever behaved like this! I thought an entire year, he said, was less long than one day, and yet he has gone away and left me after such a short visit! Oh! Just think if I had pledged myself to him by word or by

gesture! Everybody would doubt him and should henceforth doubt all the false words such as he said here. Who could believe him just because of a few tears, or a few false sighs he heaved? May the Holy Ghost come to my aid, but he hasn't lost a thing here! Nobody ever put on such a show, and that's the least I can say. I have to hand it to him."

As she said this to herself, the lady glanced down at her hands and so saw the ring. All the blood in her body rushed from her ring finger to her toes. It was a wonder she didn't faint. She was so amazed that she couldn't believe it. Her face became crimson. Then it grew deathly pale. "What's this? She cried. "God save me, but don't I see the ring that was his? Either I am out of my mind, or I saw it on his finger just a few minutes ago. He must have done it, but how? And why did he take my ring? He is not my lover, but now I am sure he thinks he is. In any case, as God is my witness, he is a past master in the art of love; and I don't know where he learned it. And how did it happen that he was able to take my ring?"

"Just because I was so preoccupied that I wasn't thinking about guarding my ring, and just because he somehow managed to slip his ring on my finger, now he will say that he is my lover. Will it be true? Am I his true love? Certainly not. That would be absolute madness. Surely he wouldn't for all the world say such a thing! I shall send word for him to come instantly and speak with me. If he wants to keep me for a friend, then I shall tell him to take back the ring. I don't believe he would dare defy me, unless he wants me to hate him."

The lady ordered a valet to mount and come to her at once. Her maidens hurried to do her commands. A valet, ready to ride, came running in to her. "Boy," she said, "now ride, and fast! Spur after that knight! Say to him, as he holds my respect dear, that he is not to proceed forward, but that he is to return here immediately. He is to speak with me of the matter we have at hand."

"Lady," he said, "I will surely give him your message to the letter." Then the valet set out after the knight, sparing neither crop nor spur, after him whom love was tormenting. He caught up with him and headed him off in less than a league from the castle. Know that the knight, because of the lady's commandment, considered himself to have been born under a lucky star. He did not, however, ask the messenger why he had been ordered to return. He knew, of course, that it was because of the ring she wore on her finger. This would be her desire to ask for her ring. He modified his direction, for he desired very much to see the lady again. The messenger was very familiar with all the roads to the castle.

And oh, Lord, but he was happy to return, except for the suspicion he had that she might want to return the ring! "I can't believe that she is angry with me," he thought, "because of what I did." The joy he felt on the return trip more than covered his doubts. He rode down all the roads there were towards the fortress.

In spite of herself the lady had already gone out of her hall towards the front of the castle. Then, step by step, she had descended the staircase of honor. Lost in thought and thoughtlessly, she had then gone into the courtyard to while away the time. On her finger she saw the ring which she intended to return to the knight. It shone. "Even if he hasn't yet put me in any danger," she said, "If he does not want to take back his ring, I won't go so far as to

pull his fine hair just for that. If I can, I will lead him over to this well, and there I will speak to him. If he does not want to take it without any fuss and bother, I will break off our conversation. How? I won't be so silly as to throw his ring down right here in the middle of the pavement. Instead I will toss it somewhere where no one will see it. Perhaps that will be the well. In the future I shall consider anything upsetting that is said to me as nothing but a dream.

“Haven't I already spent many years as a faithful wife, without any infidelity towards my husband? Now this man through his chivalry already wants me, right at our very first interview, to become his love. And if I had done it, see how he already would have been undeserving.”

Meanwhile the knight had already entered the castle courtyard, entirely unsuspecting of the lady's real state of mind. He saw her waiting anxiously. He saw her start towards him. Dismounting with a leap, he ran across the courtyard towards her just like a knight towards his true love. Neither his two companions nor anyone of the castle servants hindered him.

“Oh faith! What a good outcome is there today, my Lady, to whom I am and always shall be!” Nor had he ever spoken to her in other terms. She had already that day heard so many words that touched her heart very nearly.

“Sir,” she said, “let us stay outside. Let us walk over to this well and sit here for our delight.”

Thus far the knight could see no signs adverse to himself in what she had said. Then, too, she had so sweetly walked forward to greet him. He thought that in truth he had won her love and her good graces because of the ring. However, he was still not sufficiently convinced that he could exalt; before he could sit down he heard something that displeased him.

“Sir,” she said, “tell me, I beg you, if this is your ring which I see here, and why you left it recently with me.”

“Sweet lady,” he replied, “when I leave the second time, you will still have it. I will tell you – this you may know – if you will not consider it a falsehood – the ring is now worth twice what it was for having been on your finger. If it pleased you, even my enemies could know by this summer that you have taken me for your true love, and I you.”

“God's name,” she said, “that is not so. Rather anything else. I shall never take a step from this house, so help me God, while I am still alive, when you have either the fame or the name of my love, for anything that I may see. You have not acted chivalrously in this matter; thus you have strayed too far from propriety. Look here, I want you to have your ring. It does not suit me at all. You shall not call me your love to my sorrow because I have had it in my possession.”

Then he who had thought that he had conquered all despaired and was desolate. “My worth would be greatly diminished if what I hear is true. From this moment I shall feel no joy that does not turn itself instantly into grief.”

“Now how, Sir,” she asked, “can you possibly have either shame or annoyance from me to whom nothing, neither love nor lineage, binds you? I see no great outrage in the fact that I merely wish to return your ring. It is perfectly proper for you to take it back again since I have no right to it. I cannot keep it. I do not wish to take you as my lover because of the misconduct involved.”

“God,” he said, “if I were to drive a knife blade through my thigh, it would not cause me anywhere near the pain that your words cause me. How cruel is a person to confound and destroy another when that person has the whip hand. The forces of love bear down on me too hard; because of you they run full tilt against me and cause me great distress. There is nothing anyone can do which would make me take it back. In faith, may God never take me to my promised reward if I take it from you! You shall keep it and I shall leave you my heart also in your service. There is no device I could imagine which would show you so well how I am your servant as this one of the ring and my heart.”

She said, “Speak no more of it, for were you to make me against my will assume such an engagement with you, then you will have lost both my acquaintance and my permission to approach my presence. It is fitting, therefore, that you take back your ring.”

“Not so.”

“Even so. There’s no more to be said. Or else you are much more than a lord, or else your importunities amount to physical force, or else you want to use force to make me retain it, in spite of myself. Here. Take your ring. I shall never want to keep it.”

“Yes, you will.”

“No, I won’t”

“Yes, you will.”

“Do you try to force me, sir?”

“Not in the least, sweet love. I am perfectly well aware that such great power I do have . . . not. And I am very sorry because of it, so help me God. Never more would any misfortune or bereavement touch me, and this I firmly believe, if you were only willing to grant me a small crumb of comfort.”

“You might as well beat your head against this stone until you finally beat enough sense into it to see that you are to take back your ring.”

“I see,” said he, “that you are trying to teach me another tune. I’d let them slip the hangman’s noose about my neck first.”

There is no point in holding a longer brief on this subject. There was just no taking back, and that’s all there was to it.

”Sir,” she said, “now I am convinced that no matter what I say to you, it only makes you rant all the more. No words can lead you to taking back your ring. Therefore I shall implore you once more – upon the respect you owe me – I pray you to take back your ring, if you hold love my love dear.”

From this web there was only one exit: now he had to take it back. Otherwise she would say that his love for her was untrue and deceitful.

“God,” he said to himself, “which of these two solutions is the less bad? Now I know well that if I leave it with her, she will say that I do not love her at all. Now we are splitting hairs very finely, so fine that I am treading so narrow a thread, am so squeezed by my own protestation of love that my own honor and chivalry require me to take it back, unless I wish to break faith with this beloved and honored lady. She has implored me and put me on my honor to do so in the name of Love. When I shall have put it back on my finger, then hers will be back where it was. If I do what she requests, then I shall lose her respect. There is no such thing on the other hand, as a lover who refuses to do the bidding of his lady. And know that he who leaves some part of her desires undone does not love her. I must find a way to solve this without disobeying the commandment, for it must be otherwise.”

He still did not qualify the ring when he said, “Lady, I will take it according to my oath of love which obliges me to fulfill your wishes. At least it has been on your finger, which I see it so lovely.”

“And I return your ring on condition that you acknowledge it.”

The gentle knight remained pleasant, neither angry nor hateful. With a heart all on fire with love, he very pensively took the ring and sat sadly looking at it. Then he said, “My very great thanks to you! I see that the gold has not turned black for having been on your pretty finger.”

The lady, thinking that he was going to slip the ring on his finger, began to smile. She had won. He, however, had already decided upon an alternative course of action which was to turn out very joyfully for him. He leaned over the well, which was only nine feet deep, and where he could not help but see – so pure and clear was the water – the shadow of the lady he loved more than anything in the world.

“Know,” he said, “that I will not bring it back to you until I have bestowed it upon my sweetheart whom I love the most after you.”

“My God!” she cried, “There’s nobody here but us. Where did you find another love so quickly?”

“On my soul,” he replied, “you shall very shortly see the noble and gentle lady who shall have this ring.”

“Where is she?”

“In God’s name, see her there. Your lovely shadow waits for it.”

He took the ring in the tips of his fingers and held it out towards her in the well. “Since my lady does not want it, you will take it from me without any argument.” As the ring struck the water, its surface was broken into little waves. When the mirror had become still again, he said, “Look, Lady. She took it. Now my stock has gone up in the world since she wears something that comes from you. For you know, if there were gates and doors down there that she could open, she would come up here and say me a very sweet thank you for the honor that I have done her.”

Well, my God, wasn’t he a talented fellow in the art of chivalrous love! From that very instant no article of his suit was unpleasing to the lady! All springtime and aglow, she cast her eyes into his. The returns on an investment in courteous love are great – when a man has such talent.

“Here was this man begging so long and suing for my love, and now he is so close to having cgreat courtliness in a man. I don’t know how he remembered it. When for love of my shadow he threw his ring into the well, I could not in all duty and can not any longer deny him the reward of my love. I don’t know why I demurred so long. Never was there a man so good and so handsome who conquered love with a ring. Never was there a knight who more deserved to be loved.”

Know that she did not wound him when she said aloud, “Sweet and dear love, your sweet words and your pleasant deed and the gift which to honor me you bestowed upon my shadow have put my whole heart in yours. Now please put my ring on your finger. Here, I give it to you with my love. I am sure that you will never love it less than your own, were it ever so much less pretty.”

“The crown of the whole empire,” he replied, “could not make me as happy.”

Great was their bliss there on the edge of the well, as great as it could be. They kissed and kissed until they were satisfied, and the sweetness sank into their hearts. Their eyes did not throw their role far away, but then it was the turn of their hands. In the dance of the hands both he and the lady were artful. But as for the game which could not be done right then, it also would become them well.

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It isn't suitable for Jehan Renart to concern himself further with their relationship. If he hasn't anything else to say, he will do well to turn his thoughts elsewhere. For since their understanding and their love have molded their two hearts into one, as far as those events that remain in their lives are concerned, they will come to a head together, it seems to me. So as of this time today, I fall silent.

Here ends the Lay of the Shadow. Recount it – you who know numbers.

*Ici fenist li Lais de l'Ombre
Contez, vos qui savez de nombre!*

Love Tokens in the *Lai de l'Ombre*

The story

Why is the knight's move so clever?

Why fight over the ring?

A theory of love tokens

- emotional interactions
- emotional equilibria

Love tokens in popular ballads

Merging strategic approaches with emotions and culture

65 Child ballads contain rings

Functions of rings in the ballads

- as money or a commodity
- as a sign of richness or gentility
- as magical protection
- as love or courting gifts
- as marriage tokens
- for identification
- miscellaneous
- love tokens.

18 ballads contain rings as love tokens

Types:

A ring that reflects the state of the relationship,

One or two exchanged rings that reflect the comparative qualities of their love

A ring used as a reminder of the relationship, when lovers are separated;

A ring as one of a series of gifts symbolically describing the relationship

