**Defining France**

**Seminar 1**

**Reading**:

You should refer to one of the following editions, with facing-page French translation:

1. Marie de France, *Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Karl Warnke and trans. L. Harf-Lancner (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1990)
2. Marie de France, *Lais de Marie de France*, trans. A. Micha (Paris : Flammarion, 1994)

Please focus your reading on the following parts of the collection:

* The General Prologue to the *Lais*
* *Laüstic*/*Le Rossignol*

You might also like to look at the manuscript copy of the *Lais* in the British Library: <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_978>

**Questions to consider:**

Prologue:

1. How does Marie present her writing project? How does she explain her choice of material and the form which it takes?
2. What is the role that translation occupies in her project? What does this tell us about authorship and reception? What does this suggest about the relationships between different languages?

*Laüstic*/*Le Rossignol*:

1. How is the work presented/narrated? What is the significance of Marie’s discussion of the title?
2. Consider how language, speech, and translation are used and represented in the story.
3. How would you characterise the depiction of love in this story?
4. What happens in this text? What is the significance of the nightingale? What is its role in the narrative? Is it a fiction or a reality?
5. In what ways might the work be considered to represent its own composition/narration within the story itself?
6. How might we think about authorship and textual production?
7. Bloch suggests that language and speech in the *Lais* are fatal: ‘we find in the *Lais* three modes of fatalistic despoliation: exposure, translation or crossing over, and foreclosure. […] those who speak in the *Lais* risk death, with the understanding that it is the poetess who at bottom breaks the prohibition of disclosure by uncovering secret love affairs.’ (*The Anonymous Marie de France*, pp. 97-8). How do you understand this statement and to what extent do you agree with it?