64 Marie de France

'A, Deu sire!' fet li guipilz,
'Tant par est cist oisel gentilz!
El mund nen ad tel oisel!

Unc de mes oïlz ne vi si bel!
Fust teus ses chanz cum est ses cors,
Il vaudreit meuz que nul fin ors!
Li corps se oï si bien loër;

Que en tut le mund n'ot sun per.
Purponsé s'est qu'il chantera;
Ja pur chanter los ne perdra.
Le bek overi, si chanta,

E li furmages li eschapa.
A la tere l'estut cheir,
E li gupil le vet seisir.
Puis n'ot il cure de sun chant;

Del furmages ot sun talant.
Ceo est essample des orguillus
Ki de grant pris sunt desirus:
Par losenger, par mentir,

Les puët hum bien a gré servir.
Le lur despendent folement
Pur faus losenge de la gent.

65 Fables

The fox cried out, 'Oh God! Oh Sir!
Ah, what a noble bird is here!
I've never seen in all this world

A sight as lovely as this bird!
Would that his songs were just as fair,
Beyond pure gold he would compare!
All this grand praise the crow could hear:

How through the world he had no peer.
His voice he thought in song he'd raise;
His singing never lost him praise.
And so crow sang, his mouth agape;

And thus he let the cheese escape.
No sooner did it hit the ground,
Than fox, he seized it in a bound.
He had no interest in the song;

The cheese he'd wanted all along.
A lesson's here about the proud
Who wish with fame to be endowed:
If you should flatter them and lie,

You'll find they readily comply.
They'll spend their all quite foolishly
When they receive false flattery.

14 Del leûn malade

De un leûn cunte li escriz,
Ki tu defreiz e enveilliz.

14 The Ailing Lion

Lion's the subject of this tale
Who aged had become and frail.
Marie de France

Malades jut mut lungement,  
4 Del relever n’i ot nent.  
Tutes les bestes s’assemblerent;  
Pur lui veer, a curt alerent.  
Li plusur sunt pur lui dolent,  
8 E as esquanzen n’i chaut nent,  
E teus i a i vunt pur dun  
A la devise del leûn,  
E sauer voleient li plusur  
12 Si en lui ad mes nul retur. 
Li bucs de ses cornes la but(ut)e.  
E li asnes, que pas nel dute,  
Od le pié le fier sur le piz.

De l’autre part vient li gupilzh,  
As denz le mort par les oreilles.  
Dit li leûns, ‘Jeo vei merveilles!  
Bien me sovient que en mun eé,  
20 Quant jefnes fu e en sancte,  
Que autres bestes me dutouent  
Cume seignur e honrouent.  
Quant j’ere liez, haitiez esteient;  
24 Quant ere irez, mut se cremeient.  
Ore me veient afieblé,  
Defulé me unt e avilé.  
Mut me semble greinur vilté  
28 De ces ki furent mi privé –  
A ki jeo fis honur e bien,  
Ki n’en remembront nule rien –  
Que des autres, que jeo mesfis.

Li nunpuissant ad poi amis.’  
Par memes ceste reisun  
Pernum essample del leûn.  
Ki unc chiece en unnpoeir,  
32 Si piert sa force e sun saveir.  
Mut le tienent en grant vilté,  
Nis les plusurs qui l’unt amé.

67 Fables

Quite ill he lay for many a day  
4 And could not get up, come what may.  
The beasts assembled, every sort;  
To see the lion, they went to court.  
Most of the beasts began to mourn,  
8 But some of them showed no concern.  
Some came to see what they’d receive:  
What gifts the lion by will would leave.  
Most of them wanted to discover  
12 If he might possibly recover.  
The goat used horns the lion to butt.  
And then the ass, who feared him not,  
With hoof struck lion on the chest.  
16 Fox, from another side, came next,  
And with sharp teeth he bit each ear.  
Said lion, ‘What wonders I see here!  
Oh, I remember well the time  
20 When I was healthy, in my prime,  
That other animals felt fear  
And honoured me as their seignior.  
When I was glad, they felt delight;  
24 When I was angry, it was fright.  
Now that I’m feeble, as they see,  
They trample and defile me.  
It seems to me a worse offence  
28 From those who’ve been my bosom friends –  
Whom I have honoured, treated well,  
And yet who nothing now recall –  
Than from those beasts whom I did wrong.  
32 He has few friends who is not strong.’  
This account should serve therefore  
To teach, by lion’s tale, this lore:  
That he who sinks to impotence,  
36 Who’s lost strength and intelligence,  
Will be regarded with great scorn,  
Even by those whose love was sworn.