

Anna Jackson

"Mary, of France" is not so much a poem as an enthusiastic response to the translation Jack Ross offered of the poem "Laustic" or "Nightingale" by Marie de France, in the [previous issue](#) of Ka Mate Ka Ora. If it is not quite a poem it is even less a translation: I could not improve on Jack's translation, with his skilful use of metre and rhyme and close adherence to the sense of the original. But I wondered if the sharpness of the original, which came across more in Jack's footnotes than in the verses, could be sharpened up more in a briefer version.

Mary, of France

My name is Mary, but call me Marie –

I come from France. I am French as they come.

And so, I write about love.

Courtly, but not without feeling. Oh, not without feeling.

So much feeling, to fit inside

four walls, or, in this instance, a few lines on a page.

And so she leans out of the window...

She yearns, and she does not yearn alone.

Not so scandalous, to lean out of a window,

even if he leans out of his window and she leans out of hers

and they live next door, so that their eyes meet.

It is an affair only for their eyes.

When her husband asks what she looks out at,

she points out a little bird.

This is unfortunate for the bird.

Is she supposed to look happy when he captures the bird?

How can she look happy?

All night the bird sings to her

(it is a nightingale and sings all night)

and all night she weeps till her weeping

(and perhaps the singing) drives her husband mad.

He snaps the neck of the bird in front of her –

there is bird-blood on her dress.

No one can question now her need to cry.

Yet they do.

I don't know how the story gets out!

The bird is buried, but still the poets sing.

I am a poet, too, of course:

Mary, of France.