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Courtly Patronage Subverted: *Lancelot en prose, Petit Jehan de Saintré*[1]

Jehan de Saintré, a slightly built, timid page of just thirteen, blushing, shifting from foot to foot, twisting his belt-buckle, is the butt of Madame des Belles Cousines's not altogether kindly teasing. Who, she insists on knowing, is his *dame par amours*? After all,

d'ou sont venues les grans vaillances, les grans emprises et les chevaleureux faiz de Lancelot, de Gauvain, de Tristan [...] sinon par le service d'amours acquerir et eulz entretenir en la grace de leurs tresdesirees dames? (*JS*, p. 9)[2].

It comes as no surprise to find that Madame proposes Lancelot as a role-model at this point in the romance, and this not simply because it is traditional to cite him as one of a string of *preux*, but also because there are irresistible and unmistakeable parallels linking this first interview between Saintré and Madame to the first major dialogue between Lancelot and Guinevere in the *Lancelot en prose*[3]. Like Madame, Guinevere is imperious – and disingenuous. She, like Madame, pretends to believe that Lancelot has a secret mistress: is he not in love with one of the *dames* sitting nearby, just out of earshot?

Et votre sanblanz me mostre que vos amez ne sai la quele de ces dames la plus que vos ne faites moi, car vos an avez ploré de paor, ne n'osez esgarder vers eles de droite esgardeüre. Si m'aperçoif bien que vostre pensez n'est pas si a moi com vos me faites lo sanblant. Et par la foi que vos devez la riem que vos plus amez, dites moi la quel des trois vos amez tant[4].

[1] A first version of this paper was read at a session in honour of Professor Douglas Kelly at the 29th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1994. I am grateful for comments from those present.

[2] I quote from the edition by Jean Mishrahi and Charles A. Knudson, Geneva 1965; references henceforward in the text, prefixed *JS*. A more recent edition, by Mario Eusebi, Paris 1993, and based on the Barrois manuscript (B.N. f. fr. 10057), is still widely available.

[3] I quote from *Lancelot do Lac: the Non-Cyclic Old French Prose Romance*: vol. I: The Text, ed. by Elspeth Kennedy, Oxford 1980; references in the text prefixed *LP*.

[4] *Lancelot*, p. 346/11-17. Cf., *JS*, p. 8/4-7: «Mais de celle que plus vous amez et vouldriés qui fust vostre dame, puis quant ne la veistes vos? ».

Like Madame, she takes a slightly malign pleasure in Lancelot's disconfiture:

Et ce disoit ele bien por veoir coment ele lo porra metre a malaise, car ele cuide bien que il ne pansast d'amors s'a lui non ... Mais ele se delitoit durement en sa messaise veoir et escouter[5].

And like Madame, Guinevere is the interrogator in front of whom Lancelot, like Saintré, is reduced to painful silence:

Et li chevaliers tranble si durement que a poines puet la reine saluer, et a tote la color perdue, si que la reine s'an mervoille[6].

Even the incidental details of setting and conversation show similarities. Saintré's distress is partly a result of his isolation not just in front of Madame but in front of her ladies[7]; Galehaut fears that Lancelot is embarrassed by the presence of Guinevere's ladies and contrives to distract them so that the couple can talk *sol a sol*[8]. Madame accuses Saintré of unchivalrously avoiding her (*JS*, p. 12/12-16); Guinevere accuses Lancelot of hiding («Biaus dolz sire, por quoi vos celez vos vers moi?»[9]). And like Saintré, Lancelot is finally reduced to silence and a torrent of tears:

si an ot tel paor et tel angoise en son cuer que il ne pot respondre a ce que la reine disoit; si commance a sospirer mout durement, et les lermes li corrent tot contraval les joes si espessement que li samiz dont il estoit vestuz en fu moilliez jusques les genoz[10].

What I shall suggest here is that the resemblances between the

[5] *Lancelot*, p. 346/23-27. Cf. *JS*, p. 12/21-22: «Madame, qui darriere lui veoit ses femmes rire, s'en tenoit le plus qu'elle pouoit»; p. 13/10-11: «Madame, qui de tout ce estoit tres aise, et tant plus quant le veoit si humble et innocent».

[6] *Lancelot*, p. 340/27-29. Cf. *JS*, p. 7/25-28: «Et quant il oÿ parler de dame par amours, comme cellui qui onques ne l'avoit pensé, les yeulx larmoiant, le cuer fremist et le viz palist, si qu'il ne sceust un seul mot parler».

[7] That this sense of isolation is central to the scene is underlined by the fifteenth-century illuminators of *Jehan de Saintré*: both of the illustrated MSS dramatise the tiny figure of Jehan surrounded by menacing and powerful female figures; see my «Image as Reception: Antoine de La Sale's, *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré*», in *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture: Selected Papers from the Seventh Triennial Conference of the International Courtly Literature Society*, ed. by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox, Cambridge 1994, pp. 265-79.

[8] *Lancelot*, p. 341/5-11.

[9] Ibid., p. 341/14.

[10] Ibid., p. 345/16-20; cf. *JS*, p. 12/25-27: «Et quant il oÿt de ce parler, il ne prisa pas plus sa vie que sa morte, lors commencerent ses yeulx a plourer, son vis a palir et a tressuer».

two interviews are not coincidental, and in particular that to read Antoine de La Sale's *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* against the intertext of the *Lancelot* permits ironic cross-references which set the idealisms of romance against the sober realities of pseudo-history with particular piquancy. Antoine de La Sale, I shall suggest, applies to the commonplaces of courtly love[11] in the *Lancelot en prose* that sardonic fifteenth-century cynicism which punctures a ballade sequence full of soulful protestations of courtly fidelity with sardonic and subversive refrains like: «On puet l'un dire, mais l'autre doit on faire» or «Ainsi dit on, maiz il n'en sera riens»[12]. In order to do so, he literalises or polarises certain of the premises on which *fin'amors* is built, and so creates a peculiarly feminised chivalric world, a self-contradictory universe in the righting of which the vulgar, anti-courtly – but aggressively masculine – Damp Abbés will be the vital catalyst.

Let me return again to the interview where, of course, significant differences separate the situation in the *Lancelot en prose* from that in *Jehan de Saintré* – differences, however, which enable us to define this process of polarisation and literalisation. Lancelot, in the first place, is no boy of thirteen. On the contrary: much of the piquancy of the interview in the *Lancelot en prose* derivers from the fact that Lancelot has by now so distinguished himself in tournaments and *faits d'armes* that it is perfectly legitimate for Galahaut to have introduced him as «lo meillor chevalier do monde»[13], and that this valiant, undefeated knight is reduced to adolescent speechlessness by a poised Guinevere. The reader will find nothing incongruous in their conversation: that Lancelot should love or worship Guinevere is the legitimate tribute of chivalric perfection to rank and beauty. Guinevere's amused recognition of the reasons for Lancelot's confusion, and even Lancelot's painful avowals, are part of a recognisable courtly game. Madame, on the other hand, is also playing a game – but one whose premises are very different, and one which involves a conspiracy to which not only Madame but all her ladies are

[11] However controversial, the word remains useful for a complex of topoi; see among others Francis Lee Utley, «Must We Abandon the Concept of Courtly Love?» *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s., 3 (1972): 299-324, and William Calin, «Défense et Illustration of Fin'Amor», in *The Expansion and Transformations of Courtly Literature*, ed. by Nathaniel B. Smith and Joseph T. Snow, Athens, Georgia 1981, pp. 32-48.

[12] See Gaston Raynaud, ed., *Le Livre des cent ballades*, Paris 1905, pp. 213-14: Monseigneur de Berry's «Réponse VII», and pp. 226-27: the Bâtard de Coucy's «Réponse XIII».

[13] *Lancelot en prose*, p. 340/20.

party. Saintré is an authentic speechless adolescent of no particular distinction, with nothing but his *maintien* and his *parler* (*JS*, p. 6/13) to set him apart from a swarm of pages at the court of Jean le Bon; Madame, carefully anonymous, is apparently a member of the royal family[14]. Lancelot's love and worship of the Queen is appropriate within the conventions of courtly love; a love with disparities similar in kind, but polarised as between an adolescent of thirteen and a worldly *vesve* is less so. Indeed it is even more incongruous in that love is presented not as a freely made choice but as an imposition, thus literalising the game of authority and submission which informs courtly lyric[15]. In the course of their first interview, Madame, who has set out in some ways to form her own lover («elle vouloit en ce monde faire d'aucun josne chevalier ou escuier un homme renommé» *JS*, p. 6/6-7), hints repeatedly to Saintré that he needs a lady who will be an inspiration. The hints fall on stony ground: Saintré «n'entend pas ou elle veult venir» (*JS*, p. 35/26), and Madame is finally reduced to a carefully-phrased hypothesis: «Se je estoie celle que vous ay dit (...), me voldriez vous obeir?» (*JS*, p. 36/7-10), to which Saintré replies, guardedly: «Ma dame, je feroie tout ce que me vouldriés commander» (*JS*, p. 36/14-15). If courtly love is a game, then the game that Madame plays is deliberately presented as one of domination and submission: the paired verbs *obeir* and *commander*, the aggressive phrases which she uses to address him: «Or ça, maistre...» (*JS*, p. 6/30, p. 7/22, p. 7/29), «Sire joynet...» (*JS*, p. 9/1), «Ha! failli gentil homme ...!» (*JS*, p. 9/8), and even more particularly the metaphor with which Madame opens this first interview («vous verrez tost *la bataillé* du petit Saintré et de moy» *JS*, p. 7/3-4), and with which La Sale in his own voice closes it («Alors le *povre desconfit* print cuer...» *JS* p. 10/11-12), are symptomatic of a literalisation of precisely this dynamic. We do not need to know that thirteen was considered too young for love[16] to realise that their disparities of age and station bid fair to invalidate their love before its very inception.

But the incongruity is not only a question of age; there are other incongruities which La Sale exploits but on which he does not, ex-

[14] She calls the dukes of Anjou, Berry and Burgundy her uncles: see *JS*, p. 79/4-5, and p. 89/6-7.

[15] For a useful recent discussion of this dynamic as it operates, metaphorically, in lyric, see Sandra Resnick Alfonsi, *Masculine Submission in Troubadour Lyric*, New York/Berne/Frankfurt am Main 1986.

[16] See my article «The Pattern of Perfection: *Jehan de Saintré* and the Chivalric Ideal», *Medium Aevum* 53 (1984): pp. 254-62.

plicitly, comment. The first of these – and it is significant, surely, that the question should even arise – is the financial disparity between them. Guinevere, with characteristic courtly generosity, had of course declined to allow her position to be of any moment:

N'an aiez ja garde, biaus dolz amis, que si voirement m'aïst Dex, vos iestes plus sires et plus seürs de moi que ge ne suis de vos[17].

But that on the contrary rank and wealth are an issue between Saintré and Madame is underlined in the same interview which we have already examined. It is, it seems, not only inspiration that Saintré should look for in his lady – and Madame explains this in terms in which there is a very interesting blending of the chivalric and the financial:

Quel bien, quel *proffit*, quel honneur, quel *subcide*, quel avantaige, quel confort, quel ayde et quel conseil pour vous mectre sus en puet advenir pour estre vaillant homme? Quelz sont les *biens* que vous pouez avoir de Matheline, qui n'est encores que un enfent? (*JS*, p. 16/1-6; my italics).

The long interview descends rather bathetically into the financial: Madame gives the boy a *boursecte* (*JS*, pp. 49/31-50/13), explains how she expects the twelve *escus* it contains to be spent (doublet, hose, shirts, shoes), and even chooses and imposes the colours Saintré is to wear in his future exploits (a point to which I shall return later). From the very outset, then, Saintré is reduced to a state of dependency: the finery on which he depends for success at court and in the field – and which will in the end win him Madame's provisional love – is dependent on Madame's generosity. In a sense, then, Madame adopts a 'maternal' role[18]: responsible for Saintré's clothes and underwear, taking charge from the very beginning of their love of Saintré's comforts and well-being.

Now, financial dependency of lover on lady is nothing particularly new: rich patronesses who befriend young knights – equip them, even finance their exploits – are a frequent motif in medieval romance. This is precisely Lanval's situation, showered with an in-

[17] Lancelot en prose, p. 558/8-10. On Guinevere's generous refusal to exploit her social and financial superiority, see Elspeth Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail*, Oxford 1986, p. 64.

[18] In an off-hand but revealing pretence to the rest of his (male) acquaintances, Saintré attributes his sudden affluence precisely to the generosity of his mother; «Ma dame», dist il, «puis qu'il plait a *madame ma mere, qui veult que soye ainsin* et le m'a mandé, il fault que *je obeïsse a sa volenté*» (*JS*, pp. 62/34-63/3; my italics).

exhaustible supply of gold and silver[19], or Raymondin's, supplied with fabulous palaces and impressive armies by Melusine[20], or Partenopeus's[21], or even, perhaps, Yvain's[22]. But even if, on the surface, the relationships between mistress-patroness and lover-client seem to involve a degree of reciprocity – Lanval is already a champion, Raymondin a *gentil homme* by the time each meets his benefactress – it must surely be significant that each of these loves is precarious, and that the lovers are cruelly dependent on the favour of a lady who can so easily and completely withdraw it in the case of transgression. Financial dependency of lover and lady, in other words, is in itself problematic: behind a courtly, erotic façade, the lover's very status is also at risk, and the lady's apparently altruistic generosity enables her to impose what may be disturbing conditions. This is all the more the case in the polarised world of *Jehan de Saintré*, in that even that precarious balance of valour and position is absent: because of Saintré's youth, because the deeds which make him worthy of her are throughout financed by her, there is the uncomfortable sense, always, that Madame has *bought* her own lover[23], and that she continues to do so with dramatically increasing gifts that amount virtually to a pension: sixty *escus* for further finery (*JS*, p. 59/26-28), a hundred and sixty for horses and manservants (*JS*, p. 69/4-19), two thousand *escus d'or* for his first *emprise* (*JS*, p. 79/6-28). Surely, moreover, we are meant to read Madame's mercantile accounting and checking on quality of cloth and value for money[24] as evidence of an unattractively commercial concern, and surely, too, as I implied earlier, there is a world of difference

[19] «Cum plus despendra richement, E plus avrat or e argent.» Marie de France, *Lanval*, ll. 141-42, in *Lais*, ed. by Alfred Ewert, Oxford 1969, pp. 58-74.

[20] See Jean d'Arras, *Melusine, roman du XIV^e siècle*, ed. by Louis Stouff, Dijon 1932, pp. 45 ff.

[21] Ed. by Joseph Gildea, Villanova 1967-70; see particularly ll. 1335 ff. On *Partenopeus* in this context, see Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude and Experience in Twelfth Century France*, Chicago/London 1985, pp. 35-37.

[22] As Tony Hunt points out, «love [in *Yvain*] as a spontaneous emotion is incorporated in what looks suspiciously like an expedient, a *mariage de convenance*». See his *Chrétien de Troyes: Yvain*, Critical Guides to French Texts, London 1986, p. 54.

[23] On the way in which financial dependency subverts the relationship, see Emma Stojkovic Mazzariol, *L'Occhio e il piede: lettura critica del «Petit Jehan de Saintré» di Antoine de La Sale*, Vicenza 1979, pp. 66 ff.; she considers it central to what she calls the 'controtesto', the anti-courtly thread running throughout the romance and epitomised in the episodes with Damp Abbé.

[24] See, for instance, *JS*, p. 57/11-18: Lors lui dist: «Or ça, maistre, tout premiers, que vous cousta ce pourpoint?» – «Ma dame, tout ainsin fait j'en ai payé a Perrin de Solle six escus». – «Et les chausses?» dist Madame, «qui les a faites, et que vous ont elles cousté?».

between supplying arms, the trapping and essentials of chivalry, and prescribing the quality of Saintré's hose?

What I consider is at work here is what I called *literalisation*. The male wish-fulfilment fantasy that no doubt lies at the heart of the fictional image of rich benefactress and impecunious knight[25] has its attendant dangers, masked in romance by the trappings of fairytale or at the very least by the topoi of courtly love. Antoine de La Sale's *Petit Jehan de Saintré* is however deliberately and significantly couched in the language of pseudo-history[26]: attached to a real knight cited with admiration by Froissart[27], who is given links with the real Boucicaut[28] (and by implication, perhaps, with the real Jacques de Lalaing[29]), set at the real court of Jean le Bon and Bonne de Luxembourg[30], manipulating anonymity (as eighteenth century novelists do) to imply privy historical information. *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* is, perhaps, romance transferred to history, a sort of fictional-historical hypothesis: *what if* we transfer courtly *présupposés* to the terre à terre world of the Hundred Years' War[31],

[25] See for instance Georges Duby, «Les "jeunes" dans la société aristocratique dans la France du Nord-ouest au XII[e] siècle», in his *Hommes et structures du moyen âge*, Coll. Le savoir historique, Paris/The Hague 1973, pp. 213-225.

[26] See Ruth Morse, «Historical Fiction in Fifteenth-Century Burgundy», *Modern Language Review* 75 (1980): pp. 48-64. As she points out (pp. 61-63), the coming together of Saintré, Boucicaut, and Lalaing is interesting in this connection: the first presenting fiction as fact, the latter two presenting fact as it were as fiction. On *JS* as pseudo-history, see also Denis Lalande, «Le couple Saintré-Boucicaut dans le roman de *Jehan de Saintré*», *Romania* 111 (1990): pp. 481-494.

[27] See Jean Froissart, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Kervyn de Lettenhove, Brussels 1870-77, II, 6; III, 343; V, 443, 445, 452. See on this subject Charles A. Knudson, «The historical Saintré», in *Jean Misrahi Memorial Volume: Studies in Medieval Literature*, ed. by Hans R. Runte, Henri Niedzielski and William L. Hendrickson, Columbia, S.C., 1977, pp. 284-309.

[28] See pp. 181 ff., where Saintré refers to Boucicaut as his *frère*. Saintré and Boucicaut are associated at the *pas d'armes* at Calais and that against Nicole de Malatestes and Gallias de Mantua. The historical Saintré, seneschal of Anjou, was imprisonned with Boucicaut *père* after the battles of Taillebourg and Poitiers (see Froissart, *Chroniques*, V, pp. 283, 287, 452).

[29] Raynaud argues that part of Madame's sermon to Jehan, on the seven deadly sins, is based on Jacques's father's sermon to his son in the *Livre des faits* (see G. Raynaud, «Un nouveau manuscrit du *Petit Jehan de Saintré*», *Romania* 31 [1902]: pp. 527-56), and Bronarski that Saintré's jousts against the English (described very briefly, pp. 185-87) resemble Lalaing's (see pp. 228-30 in his «*Le Petit Jehan de Saintré*, une énigme littéraire», *Archivum Romanicum* 5 [1921]: pp. 187-238).

[30] The court is real enough, but La Sale's historical accuracy is shaky: he has Bonne de Luxembourg queen of France, for instance, whereas in reality she died in 1349, before her husband Jean le Bon was crowned king in 1350.

[31] Virginia Crosley («Ironic Ambiguity in La Sale's *Petit Jehan de Saintré*», *Fifteenth-century Studies*, ed. by Guy Mermier and Edelgard DuBruck [Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1978], pp. 71-82) would see all the characters in the romance as

what if a Lancelot and a Guinevere had to acconmodate their courtly affair to the practicalities of a real world? It is this hypothesis which Antoine explores and whose absurdities, carefully polarised here in the person of the wealthy, royal widow and the thirteen-year-old boy, lead ineluctably to the violent finale. The fictional world of courtly romance can after all acconmodate the *données* of courtly love only by blurring awkward questions. Transferring these *données* to the «real», the pseudo-historical, unavoidably points up certain implausibilities. If, for instance, courtly love presupposes an inseparable distance between lover and lady, how – in purely practical terms – is this distance to be bridged? How is the lover to pluck up courage to address his lady? How indeed – concretely – is the lover to acquire the resources that will enable him to bridge class and financial differences? The dynamics of submission and authority may operate excitingly in courtly lyric or in the otherworld of romance, but how is this to modulate, in «real-world» terms, to a relationship of parity?[32] In particular, how is the inspirational role of the lady to be made manifest in the «real world»? «Ennoblement» in a chivalric society may involve imponderables like *cortezia* or *mezura*, but in the real world the hero's growing stature and reputation can only be measured, concretely, in chivalric terms – and in the circumstances of fifteenth-century society, that requires resource.

What seems to me to confirm an intertextual link between *Jehan de Saintré* and the *Lancelot en prose* is the fact that this financial provision is provided by the very lady who also supplies instruction in the ethos of courtliness and chivalry. Madame des Belles Cousines, I consider, reifies the sorts of implausibility and incongruity that I have been talking about by conflating in her single person what are ultimately two incompatible roles, the erotic and the maternal: that of lady (modelled on Guinevere) and that of mentor

«anachronistic clichés», «variously flawed and foolish-looking people engaged in a game of intimate relations of dubious social and literary value» (p. 73). La Sale's ultimate emancipation of Saintré from Madame's influence suggests, however, that Antoine sees Saintré at least as recuperable. For a judicious look at the comedy of *JS*, see Daniel Poirion, «Valeurs du rire dans *Jean de Saintré*», *Actes du 4e colloque international sur le Moyen Français*, Milan, 1986, pp. 89-101.

[32] For an interesting study of the ambivalences of the courtly *dompna*, see Jean-Charles Payen, «Figures féminines dans le roman médiéval français», in *Entretiens sur la Renaissance du 12e siècle*, ed. by Maurice de Gondillac and Edouard Jeauneau, Décades du Centre culturel international de Cerisy-La-Salle, n.s. 9, Paris/The Hague 1968, pp. 407-28.

and mother (calqued this time on the Dame du Lac[33]). There are striking and persistent similarities between the content and narrative function of the episode where the Dame du Lac instructs the young Lancelot before his departure for Arthur's court[34], and that where Madame des Belles Cousines instructs the young Saintré: the liminal role of each speech, the similarities between the interlocutors (older woman with young, untried squire), the apparent emphasis on the perfecting of the inner self, the acceptance indeed that the inner self makes a slighter, less formidable outer self unimportant, the use of authorities, the preaching of a high destiny – are all shared between both romances. And of course each speech is the preliminary to what I described earlier, the material equipping of the boy for his destiny: the Dame du Lac equips Lancelot in white arms and armour («por ce qu'ele ne voloit qu'il i eüst rien qui ne fust blanche» [*LP*, p. 148]), Madame gives Saintré a foretaste of the luxury in store by planning and financing his wardrobe. There is a conjoining of the inner and outer selves which, it seems, will send Lancelot and Jehan out into the world inwardly enlightened and outwardly immaculate.

And yet, of course, to read this section of *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* against the intertext of the *Lancelot en prose*, to set the rhetorically and stylistically elegant sentences in which the Dame du Lac explains the duties of the knight, and Madame evokes the authority of the Ancients, is to measure the contrast between Guinevere's unconscious and selfless role as the inspirer of chivalric excellence, and Madame's conscious and self-centred role as creator of a lover whose chivalric qualities will serve primarily to flatter herself[35]. The contrast is obvious on the semiotic level, something evident from the last comparison I mentioned above, the clothing and equipping of the boys. The Dame du Lac, we are told, «a (...) bien atornee a l'enfant tote sa besoigne» (*LP*, p. 147): the finest arms and armour that money can buy. A superficial reading might suggest a similar care on Madame's part – but where the Dame du Lac sends Lancelot out into the world pure and 'unlabelled', in the

[33] On the Dame du Lac's maternal role in the *Lancelot en prose*, see an article by Françoise Paradis, «La triple mise au monde d'un héros, ou trois images d'une féminité maîtrisée dans le début du *Lancelot en prose*», in *Approches du Lancelot en prose* ed. by Jean Dufournet, Paris 1984, pp. 157-76.

[34] On this scene, see Jean Frappier, «L'"institution" de Lancelot dans le *Lancelot en prose*», in *Mélanges de philologie romane et de littérature médiévale offerts à Ernest Hoepffner*, Paris 1949, pp. 269-78, and Elspeth Kennedy, «Social and Political Ideas in the French Prose *Lancelot*», *Medium Aevum* 26 (1957): pp. 90-106.

[35] For Mazzariol too, Madame is the prime source of ambivalence in the romance: op. cit., pp. 63 ff.

white on which he will later be able to imprint his own (or an eventual lady's) identity, Madame carefully sends Saintré out labelled as her possession:

> Mon ami, je vous donne ceste boursecte telle qu'elle est (...). Si veul que les couleurs dont est faite et les lectres entrelassees, d'ores en avant pour l'amour de moy vous portez. (*JS*, pp. 49-50).

And we should probably notice the fact that, in that characteristic juxtaposition of the amatory and the monetary, the colours are derived from a *boursecte*. But the major point, of course, is that the episode, by an effect of *mise en abyme*, has Madame preempting the boy's future chivalric self by stamping it with her own identity.

This jarring little detail invites us to look again at the long speeches that immediately precede it. More carefully read, Madame's speech, which had appeared to preach a virtuous and Christian gospel not dissimilar from that of the Dame du Lac, in fact subordinates inner worth to the outer figure of the lover. Taking as 'text' a ballade, *C'est tout que d'amer loyalment*, Madame proffers what amounts to a sermon on the seven deadly sins, laced with quotations from Latin and Greek authorities and from the Bible[36]. In fact, however, as its text implies, the 'sermon' subordinates Christian to amatory doctrines: pride, for instance, is not so much sinful as simply unattractive, and thus what is to be avoided is the appearance of pride, what is to be sought is a public *semblance* of humility:

> Au regart du pechié d'orgueil: pour acquerir par l'amant la tres desiree grace de sa dame, se efforcera d'estre doulz, humble, courtois et gracieux, afin que nul deshonneste parler ne puist estre dit de lui (*JS*, p. 17).

And envy is only condemnable in so far as one's chosen lady will find it unattractive:

[36] In an interesting article, Madeleine Jeay has recently argued that the function of this long sermon should be re-examined: see her « Les éléments didactiques et descriptifs de *Jehan de Saintré*. Des lourdeurs à reconsidérer », *Fifteenth Century Studies* 19 (1992): pp. 85-100. Contemporary readers, however, were clearly doubtful about Madame's sermonising: beside her speeches in one manuscript, a sixteenth-century hand has categorised the fact that the lady lectures Saintré with Latin texts and tags as *chose indecente a une femme* (see A. Coville, *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré: recherches complémentaires*, Paris 1937, p. 12). Allison Kelly, not quite convincingly, has suggested that Madame's didactic persona might be based on contemporary perceptions of Christine de Pizan: « Christine de Pizan and Antoine de la Sale: The Dangers of Love in Theory and Fiction », in *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, ed. by E.J. Richards, J. Williamson, N. Margolis and C. Reno, Athens/London 1992, pp. 173-186.

Et quant au III[e] pechié, qui est de envie, ce vray amoreux, tel que je dy, jamais sur homme ne sera envieux, car se il venoit a congnoissance de sa dame, il la perdroit vraiement. (*JS*, p. 20).

This contrast between an expedient and surface moral code in Madame's mouth and a principled integrity in the Dame du Lac's is nowhere more apparent than in their attitudes to chivalry itself. The burden of the Dame du Lac's speech is that Lancelot should dedicate his self to the pursuit of a chivalry whose raison d'être is service: to *Sainte Eglise* and, strikingly, to *lo pueple* whose labour maintains the knight[37]. This sense of a social duty, of an obligation owed, is absent from the hermetic and selfish world that Madame projects, where chivalry exists – as we shall progressively discover – only as an opportunity for display and for self-advancement in the hermetic world of the court. What is symptomatic of the difference between this and Madame's definition of chivalry is the coda to the latter's sermon, which sets personal salvation and fame and love in a piecemeal and rather incongruous juxtaposition:

Lesquelles choses je vous ay dictes pour estre vray ami de Dieu et un des hommes renommez de ce royaume, voire du monde (...). Et par ainsi ne pourrez faillir que en les suivant au service de vostre dame et d'amours ne soiez vrayment sauvez, non seullement au corps, mais en ame et en corps. (*JS*, p. 48/12-19).

This highest of callings thus becomes subsidiary to the winning of a lady – and this in turn, at the end of Madame's speech, is tellingly intermingled with financial inducements:

Et quant je verray que ainsin vous vous gouvernerez, ou au moins de toutes ces choses au mieulz que vous pourrez, alors je vous aimeray, *feray des biens*, et serez mon ami vraiement. (*JS*, p. 48/19-23).

Here too, I consider that what is at work is a degree of *literalisation*, a knowing subversion of an intertext. It is, of course, a commonplace of romance and courtly love to postulate a love in which the lady inspires, the lover acts: a relationship which in the courtly lyric finds metaphoric expression now in the feudal relationship between vassal and lord, now in the spiritual relationship between worshipper and object of worship. In its «ideal» form – in the *Lancelot en prose*, for instance – this love is projected as stemming

[37] For the political and social antecedents of this, see for instance Georges Duby, *Les Trois Ordres, ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme*, Paris 1978.

from a perfect generosity of spirit: Lancelot and Guivenere, it seems, hope for nothing beyond mutual ennoblement.

Se com vos plaisoit, ge me tandroie en quel que lieu que ge alasse por vostre chevalier. (*LP*, p. 165).

It is precisely these *présupposés* that *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* literalises – even unmasks. Plot summary suggests courtly romance, but a closer analysis admits a double, ambiguous reading redolent of disruption and parody. Even the genesis of the affair is very different: Guinevere is the unconscious inspirer, Madame the conscious creator, of chivalric excellence. The distance between Guinevere and Lancelot is less one of class or resources than of worshipper and worshipped; the distance between Jean and Madame is polarised as between a young widow of considerable independent wealth and of royal blood, and the page of respectable family, little means and positively embarrassing youth. The distance between Madame and Saintré can never be bridged, and Madame herself will not allow it to be so: with careful detail, Antoine de La Sale will demonstrate that her economic superiority and closeness to the king and queen will always « buy » Saintré, that her choices, her programming of his chivalric progress (encapsulated in the formulaic *je voel et commande*[38]), can never be transgressed – indeed, the first and only transgression is the pretext for the rupture of their affair.

Moreover – and this is the crucial point – what is demanded is not *service d'amours* in any recognisable romance sense. The lady who is to become its object defines the nature of this service. In the course of the long sermon of which I spoke above, Madame descends from the seven deadly sins to the everyday[39]: Saintré is not to pick his teeth in public; he is to remember to comb his hair, to say his prayers before bed-time, and not to gossip in church or eat too much. I spoke earlier of Madame's conflating two mutually incompatible roles, the erotic and the maternal, derived from two models, Guinevere and the Dame du Lac. This necessarily results in a confusion of roles for Saintré: infantilised, even emasculated, in private as pupil and financial dependent, and yet in public instructed to become the very epitome of masculine identity, an ambivalence all the greater measured against the integrity of a Lancelot whose instructress is a legitimate and not an ersatz surrogate mother, whose

[38] The phrase is used no less that 26 times between pp. 36 and 50.
[39] Notably in a long speech, pp. 43/30-47/19.

lady, though greater in rank and status and with greater poise and maturity, accepts his willing and freely given service, rather than prescribing it.

It is this, perhaps, that explains not just the brutality of the *dénouement*, but the interesting terms in which that *dénouement* is described. Saintré returns from the last *emprise*, in which he has engaged contrary to Madame's wishes[40], to be insulted by a cold greeting. Saintré's bewildered response is couched in significant terms: his obedience requires her courtesy:

> Hélas, ma dame, est ce a bon essiant, ou pour moy essayer, que si feible response m'avez faite, qui suis cellui qui tant vous ay amee, et suis *cellui qui onques ne vous desobeÿ*? (*JS*, p. 273/25-28; my italics)[41].

In romance, of course, the assumption is that none of the beloved's commands can ever be other than honorable. Once again, *Jehan de Saintré* is literalising this commonplace and transferring it to the 'real world' where a lady may not always be so scrupulous, where service has come close to engulfment, and where the object of love-service so signally merges the erotic and the maternal.

Le Petit Jehan de Saintré focuses primarily on a young man's acquisition of psychological identity in the public sphere of chivalry. A woman may well have a role to play in this project, but it must be a subsidiary one since women operate only within the private, emotional sphere, and cannot experience – still less regulate – the move into the public arena in which a chivalric name is to be made[42]. I have argued elsewhere[43] that La Sale sees Madame as the intruder in the masculine world of chivalry, a perverted (female) Pygmalion seeking a vicarious fulfilment in a male Galatea[44]. What La Sale gives us is a young knight engulfed by the female world. The confusion of maternal and erotic roles means that Saintré's birth into

[40] See *JS*, pp. 233/26-234/11.

[41] This is precisely the point that La Sale deploys, in his own voice: «Le seigneur de Saintré, qui de tous poins avoit si tres faulcement perdue l'amour de sa dame par la desloiauté d'elle, *que tant et si loialment servie avoit*» (*JS*, p. 284/3-6); cf. also *JS*, 289/2-6.

[42] See Penny Schine Gold, op. cit., p. 41, and for some interesting remarks on establishing masculine identity, Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*, Berkeley 1981, especially pp. 1-41.

[43] See my «The Parrot, the Knight and the Decline of Chivalry», in *Conjonctures: Medieval Studies in Honor of Douglas Kelly*, ed. by Keith Busby and Norris J. Lacy, Amsterdam 1994, pp. 529-44.

[44] For this comparison, see pp. 244-45 in Clifton Cherpack, «*Le Petit Jehan de Saintré*: the Archetypal Background», *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 5 (1975):243-52.

manhood, his empowerment, must involve a violent rejection of Madame[45]. She is at once the seal of Saintré's heroism and the prime obstacle to it, and however great his reputation may have become, his subservience demonstrates the futility of « masculine » actions as long as they are harnessed to Madame des Belles Cousines. She represents a critical threat to his full entry into the male world of chivalry; his emancipation from the engulfing woman and his acquisition of a developed and authentic manly self are mediated by progressively distancing moves.

The first of these is the Crusade itself. When Madame cedes Saintré to this astonishingly successful adventure, it is with words in which Saintré's lack of autonomy and masculine identity are systematically enshrined:

> Maiz, pour ceste foiz seullement et non plus, vous y veul adventurer. (*JS*, p. 187/17-18).

For the first time, however, Saintré will be released from Madame's tutelage – and it in this circumstance too that Saintré will undergo the rite of passage which involves his being made knight by the King of Bohemia himself (*JS*, p. 214/21-30). From this point, significantly, Saintré is never again presented as infantilised. His reunion with Madame, the Crusade over, is couched in highly erotic and unambiguously positive terms (*JS*, p. 227/17-30), but what is now missing is any suggestion of Madame as encroaching on chivalric prerogatives. Indeed, the second stage of Saintré's emancipation involves his wresting from her control of his own chivalric career: he chooses, elaborates and apparently finances his own *emprise*. Madame's fury and her immediate sexual withdrawal are explicable only, perhaps, if we imagine that she too recognises that her (maternal) power to mold her creature is escaping her.

But what motivates and explains Saintré's final emancipation from Madame's engulfing presence is Madame's own choice – this time, not of an unformed adolescent but of an overtly sensual monk, the almost aggressively masculine Damp Abbé. The contrast

[45] In psycho-analytical terms, Ralph Greenson argues that it is not castration that is the critical threat to masculinity, but rather engulfment by the mother, and the boy's prime task in establishing his identity is not oedipal but pre-oedipal, that of « dis-identifying » from his mother, and « counter-identifying » with his father, these being interdependent and complementary processes; see his « Dis-identifying from Mother: its Special Importance for the Boy », *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 49 (1968):370-74, and cf., on the male adolescent crisis of identity, Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, Harmondsworth 1965, pp. 298-316.

between the latter and Saintré is polarised by the appearance of each at their comic wrestling match: Saintré in his delicate and modest *chausses* embroidered with pearls, Damp Abbé with his *grosses cuisses pelues et velues comme un ours* (*JS*, p. 281/4-5). It is also enshined in La Sale's own ironic redeployment of the hackneyed metaphors which, in courtly love terms, connote the topos « they fell in love immediately »: « les yeulx, archiers des cuers, peu a peu commencerent l'un des cuers a l'autre traire, et tellement que les piez couvers de la tres large touaille jusques a terre commencerent de peu a peu l'un sur l'autre touchier » (*JS*, p. 249/26-30); « Lors recommancent leurs archiers d'amours plus fort a traire et de leurs piez l'un sur l'autre marchier plus que encores n'avoient fait » (*JS*, p. 250/10-12).

Much more important, however, is the fact that Saintré's final emancipation, encapsulated in two moments, is framed not just as a refusal of service, but also as a renunciation of previous identity, and thus, perhaps, as a rebirth. In the first, Saintré has been worsted in the wrestling-match with Damp Abbé; he traps the abbot into playing his, Saintré's, chivalric game. Madame is suspicious, and attempts to reimpose her own authority, with the pleonastic catch-phrase that has always marked their relationship:

Sire de Saintré, nous *voulons* et vous *commandons* que sur peine d'encheoir en nostre indignacion, incontinant tous deux vous desarmez, et se ne le faites, comme fol et cornart nous vous ferons du corps et de la vie couroucier et pugnir. (*JS*, p. 295/21-26; my italics).

For the last time in the romance, Saintré invokes his long service:

Or faulse desloialle telle, telle et telle que vous estes, je vous ay si tresloialment *servie* longuement que onques homme puist servir et complaire a femme. (*JS*, pp. 296/29-297/1; my italics).

– and refuses, vehemently, to obey. In the second, Saintré tells a circle of court ladies (including Madame) their history in veiled terms, then invites his audience to comment. Madame, with ill grace, can only condemn the (anonymous) lover as *tres mal gracieux* (*JS*, p. 306/25-26). And with a final dramatic gesture, Saintré lays her own blue girdle across her lap – and renounces his identity as her lover

Ma dame, je ne veul plus estre ce tres malgracieux. (*JS*, p. 307/4-5).

The process of polarisation and literalisation is now complete. Madame des Belles Cousines, product of an uneasy and disturbing fusion between Guinevere and the Dame du Lac, the erotic and the maternal, is neutralised, and her *druerie* punished. Saintré, it seems, graduates to an unambiguous male identity as the *plus vaillant chevalier de France, et plus, que pour lors sera* (*JS*, p. 308/29-30); the ending of the romance sets aside Eros, since the rest of Saintré's life (as briefly summarised by La Sale) consists of adventures in the male, chivalric sphere.

Critics like Huizinga[46] – or Kilgour[47] – tend to draw severe distinctions between the *games* of courtly love and the *participants*: to note how Charles VI's «cour amoureuse» consisted of rapists and misogynists. This is naive: it is precisely *because* the *cour amoureuse* is a game that it need not be taken seriously by its participants. What Antoine de La Sale does, however, is to embody within the same essentially literary and textual fiction the ambivalences and polar opposites which were conventionally left for the outsider to discern. In the real fifteenth-century world, of which *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* is a 'history', a properly sanctioned, morally clear masculinity, it seems, cannot co-exist with the «romantic» *service d'amours*. *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* presupposes a collusion between writer, reader and hero – a male bonding?[48] – in recogising how dangerous for the male world of chivalry is woman as mentor or arbiter, mother and erotic object. It is not, of course, that the *literary* Guinevere and the *literary* Dame du Lac pose a threat – but in the world which La Sale purports to record, and of which he holds so perfectly conservative a view[49], femininity is something to be transcended, and man's peculiar emotional vulnerability to women is a danger to the male chivalric identity.

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[46] *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, repr. Aylesbury, Penguin Books, 1965, pp. 98 ff.

[47] *The Decline of Chivalry as Shown in the Literature of the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, MA 1937, pp. 124-26. For some pertinent comments, see Maurice Keen, «Huizinga, Kilgour and the Decline of Chivalry», *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s., 8 (1977): pp. 1-20.

[48] For some interesting remarks on this sort of male identification, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York 1985, especially the introduction.

[49] La Sale's treatise on tournaments (*Des anciens tournois et faits d'armes*) is very much an exercise in nostalgia.