

Recovering the Author in Philippe de Remy's *Manekine*

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If, as Roberta Krueger has suggested, “most medieval romances are sophisticated and self-reflective literary creations which invite the educated reader to observe their paradoxes and ambiguities” (Krueger 406), then *La Manekine* may provide particular insights into the relationship between gender and creativity.¹ This thirteenth-century narrative by Philippe de Remy is a rare example of a male-authored romance with a female protagonist. It is, in fact, the first recorded vernacular inscription of the archetypal folktale known as “the girl without hands,” an initiation story recounting a young girl’s tribulations from adolescence, in which she is an apparently powerless victim threatened with an incestuous (or other unacceptable) relationship, through to marriage, motherhood, and an acknowledged place in society.²

As an author, Philippe is clearly anxious about the reception of *La Manekine*, his first attempt at literary creativity. Both the prologue and the epilogue of the romance reveal that he is acutely aware of his inexperience as a storyteller and concerned that his audience not be overly critical about his shortcomings. Beyond these stated reasons, however, a major source of anxiety may well be the tensions created by his recounting an adventure that transgresses the boundaries of acceptable conduct: the story of the King of Hungary’s desire to marry his daughter, Joïe, with the permission of the Pope.³ In the present analysis, I shall discuss the narrative strategies Philippe uses in order to construct this unconventional romance with its unusual heroine. I shall concentrate on three areas: firstly, the prologue and epilogue of the romance, then other authorial

interventions that Philippe uses to craft his work and shape its reception, and finally the role of the intratextual public that witnesses narrative events. Analysing these strategies will help us to assess the extent to which the text is self-reflective and to recover the author within the space of his romance.

Joïe is the daughter of the widowed King of Hungary who proposes to marry her in order to keep the promise he made to his wife on her deathbed that he would marry only a woman who resembled her. To escape this incestuous marriage, Joïe resorts to cutting off her left hand and is promptly condemned by her irate father to be burnt alive. However, his seneschal only pretends to carry out the sentence and secretly casts her adrift in a boat without sail or rudder at the mercy of the waves. Landing in Scotland, she refuses to divulge her identity and is known henceforth only as “Manekine”—the girl without hands.⁴ She inspires the love of the courtly young King of Scotland and marries him, but falls victim to his mother’s jealousy. Through the latter’s machinations during the King’s absence at tournaments in France, Manekine is again condemned to be burnt alive, together with her newborn son. Effigies of the two are burnt instead and again Joïe is cast adrift in the same boat. Arriving in Rome, Manekine is taken in by a senator. After searching for his wife and son for several years, the King of Scotland arrives in Rome on the same day as the now-repentant King of Hungary. All are finally reunited and reconciled and Joïe’s hand, preserved intact in the belly of a sturgeon, is restored by the Pope. The King of Scotland is recognised as the heir to Hungary and, through Joïe, also to Armenia, following which the royal couple settles in Scotland.

It is significant that throughout the romance Philippe gives Joïe-Manekine a strong voice to articulate her concerns or utter her desires. She braves the patriarchy, flouting royal and paternal authority to refuse the proposed incestuous marriage with her father. She expresses her love for the King of Scotland not only in the language of courtliness but also in terms of physical joy. She cries out to God to spare her life as she is twice cast adrift and she implores the seneschal to spare her infant son, moving him to mercy at the risk of his own life. Joïe is constructed as a complex textual figure; she is not a conventional courtly woman.⁵

Philippe makes no attempt to hide the fact that he is the author of this unconventional romance, naming himself in the very first line of the prologue and again in the epilogue. In the forty-eight-line prologue he addresses his audience directly and

states his objective of telling a tale that is at one and the same time pleasing and instructive. He proves to be conscious both of his status as an author and of his shortcomings as an artist; in one breath he exhorts those who do not want to hear a moral tale to go away and in the next he apologises for his inability to compose sophisticated rhymes (*rimes léonines*), for he did not have a lengthy education and has never written a single line of verse in his life:

Et se je ne sai leonime,
 Merveillier ne s'en doit on mie;
 Car mout petit sai de clergie,
 No onques mais rime ne fis. (vv 30-33)

Consistent with the prologue's objective of telling a moral tale is the epilogue, which proposes *La Manekine* as an exemplar for those who suffer misfortune. Refusing to despair, Manekine placed her trust in God and the Blessed Virgin Mary and was rewarded, says Philippe. We must pray that He keep us also from despair—and may He grant Philippe, who has laboured to put this story into verse, a very happy life:

Et vous, priiés Dieu qui tout voit
 Que il celui grant joie otroit
 Qui de penser se vaut limer
 Pour la Manequine rimer. (vv 8583-86)

These are pious words indeed! But how can Philippe present as a moral tale material in which a King (albeit of distant Hungary) attempts an incestuous marriage with his own daughter, with the blessing of the Pope? How can he make such attacks on the established order without provoking the indignation of his audience? How, in short, does he control listener or reader-response in order to meet his double objective, to entertain and to instruct?

In fact, Philippe is present throughout his story, enshrined in the text as narrator. He has frequent recourse to the *auctoritas* topos reminding his readers that he is merely re-telling, in verse, an existing story: “Ainsi comme je truis ou conte” (v 61), “Or dist li contes” (v 1069). This distancing is seen, too, in his use of proverbs to underscore a point with an appeal to popular wisdom or even to structure narrative events. For example, he prefaces the segment in which Joie escapes marriage with her father “Or quident bien tenir ou poing/Tel cose dont il sont mout loing” (vv 645-

46). To make the story easier to follow, he marks narrative shifts clearly in lines such as “De l'esturjon ci vous lairai/Et a Joïe revenrai” (vv 737-38) and “Dou commun vous voldrai laissier/Au senescal voel repairier”(vv 879-80). Furthermore, he is courteous toward his audience, considerately changing to a new topic so that his readers or listeners will not be bored: “Se je contoie leur anuis/De l'escouter seroit anuis” (vv 267-8). He draws them into his work, with frequent appeals to his audience to visualize a scene or use their imagination to supply details: “Es les vous a la court venus” (v 1245), “Se je devoioie leur mes/Ici arresteroie hui mes” (vv 2283-84) “Or escoutés bele merveille” (v 6829). And, of course, Philippe holds their interest by creating suspense. Of the messenger's return to Scotland bearing the false order that Manekine and her son are to be put to death, Philippe observes:

Trois semaines eut demouré,
Es le vous trop tost retourné.
Il venist miex k'il fust noiiés,
Qu'il fust illueques ravoiés. (vv 3483-86)

Elsewhere, he foreshadows the King of Scotland's arduous seven-year voyage in search of his wife when he comments about the barons:

Ne le verront mais de leur eus,
S'avra eü mainte pesance,
Maint anui et mainte grevance. (vv 5460-62)

Such interventions show Philippe's preoccupation with the composition of his romance and its reception by the public. At this primary level of interaction, the author is at pains to keep his narrative under control, to identify clearly the different phases of the action as well as the romance's main characters. However, as events unfold, a more subtle level of interaction becomes evident; in fact, the author comments on actions, allying himself with certain characters and expressing disapproval or disparagement of others. It is noteworthy that on the one hand, Philippe uses a few well-chosen words to characterise those who help Joïe as good. The jailer who sends his daughter to keep Joïe company as she awaits death is the “courtois carrier” (v 850), the seneschal who helps her escape is “sages et plains de foy” (v 881) and the senator who takes Joïe into his household in Rome is called the “plus pseudomme/Qui fust en la vile de Romme” (vv 4965-66). On the other hand, Philippe invokes the wrath of God on the baron serving Joïe who first notices that she is the image of her mother and should therefore marry her father:

Uns des barons de l'escuële
 Le servi, cui Dieus destourbier
 Doinst; qu'il avint grant encombrier
 A la demosiele par lui,
 Ainsi com vous orrés ancui. (vv 300-4)

As for the Dowager Queen of Scotland, whose hatred of Joie leads to the latter's second death sentence, her second perilous escape across the seas and her seven-year exile in Rome, she is excoriated to the point of demonisation:

Dix maldie son cors et s'ame!
 U monde n'ot si male dame
 Ne de mal si esciënteuse; (vv 1803-5)

The recurring line "Dix maldie son cors et s'ame" (vv 2312, with *maudie* 3156) marks the Queen as intrinsically and irrevocably evil, as does the appellation "la male dame."

As Philippe progressively discloses the characters and their actions, his solidarity with Joie becomes obvious. Yet surprisingly, there is little outright condemnation of the main male characters who instigate narrative action. Philippe shows two causes for the King of Hungary's inappropriate love for his daughter: the power of love and the power of women. Love is the blind force that strikes medieval man at will, leaving him powerless to resist; despite the King's best efforts to appeal to Reason, Love will prevail. As for the power of women, even the wisest and most learned of men have fallen prey to women's beauty—and Joie is more beautiful even than Helen of Troy, "De plus grant biauté que Elayne" (v 395). But if the King is not to blame, neither is Joie. Philippe emphasises that she is an innocent victim; untainted by any hint of feminine wiles:

Mais avenu est as plusiours;
 Que par feme ont esté destruit
 Li plus sage et il miex estruit,
 Et tel fois coupes n'i avoient
 Les femmes pour qu'il emprenoient
 Les folies et les outrages;
 S'en tournoit sur euls li damages
 Et sur eles tout ensement;
 Car on retrait et dit souvent:

Souvent compere autrui pecié
 Teuls qui n'i a de riens pecié
 Ausi fist Joïe la bele... (vv 400-11)

What of the King of Scotland? Philippe expresses no open criticism of him either, even though he leaves his wife pregnant and vulnerable to the Dowager Queen's hostility and goes off to seek his fame at tournaments in France. Philippe's commentary seems to show solidarity with the courtly young king:

Las! dont il ot puis tant tormens
 Qu'il n'est nus qui le peüst dire
 Ne clers qui le seüst escrire. (vv 2472-74)

He attributes the best of motives to him—his decision is prompted by the prospect of fatherhood—and he details the orders the King leaves so as to meet Joïe's concerns for her safety. In fact, Philippe shows two equally valid but opposing claims on the King: his public duty in feudal society and his private duty to his wife. In his treatment of the two kings, so readily forgiven by Joïe and absolved by the Pope, Philippe is evidently careful not to alienate his public by openly subverting the patriarchy or challenging the *status quo*.

Reinforcing Philippe's observations about characters and events is a further narrative stratagem, the voice of the people. As the intratextual common folk react spontaneously to narrative events, their voice supplies the appropriate responses that Philippe hopes to elicit from his audience. The inscribed public is present from the beginning of the romance to the end, from Hungary to Scotland, Rome and Armenia. The people of Hungary rejoice at Joïe's birth and grieve at the news that her father has condemned her to death. She is particularly beloved by the poor, to whom she gives clothes, but all Hungarians are shocked that she is to be cruelly punished for her virtue:

«Diex! quel dolor et quels peciés
 Avient chiaus de ceste contree
 De la millour qui ainc fust nee,
 Qui sera arse sans merci
 Pour la bonté qui est en li!» (vv 870-74)

When they are led to believe that she has been burnt at the stake, they feel betrayed, curse their king and conceive a hatred for him that lasts until, a decade later, he truly repents and goes to Rome to seek absolution:

Grant piece en ot esté haïs
 De tout le commun du païs,
 Mais or voient qu'il s'en repent.
 Pour chou la voie a Romme emprent (vv 6805-8)

In Scotland, when Joïe lands on the beach at Berwick, the crowd is celebrating a traditional feast day. The people of Scotland also quickly grow to love her (vv 1365-78), overcoming any misgivings they may have about her unknown origins, her lack of fortune and unconcealed mutilation. Philippe stresses that all the Scots love Joïe for her piety, the alms she gives to the poor and the marriages she arranges (vv 2425-44). Though the King of Scotland's three counsellors agree to carry out his false order to kill Manekine, saying that the King must have his reasons, the ordinary people of Scotland have the true measure of her character. The crowd's lengthy outpouring of grief ends with the exclamation:

«Honis soit qui en amistiés
 Se fiëra ja mais nul jour,
 Se ele meurt a tel dolour!» (vv 3608-10)

And watching Manekine and her infant son being burnt at the stake (or so they believe), the crowd aims harsh criticism at the King of Scotland. Conversely, the people of Rome applaud Joïe's good fortune as they witness her reunion with her father and the miracle of the restored hand. Then, on a triumphal journey through Hungary and Armenia back to Scotland, the inhabitants of these countries flock to receive Joïe with feasting and festivities:

Ne vous poroit estre noncié
 La joie, la feste, l'oneur
 Que il font leur novel signeur
 Et leur dame la retrouvee,
 Qui Dius leur avoit retornee.
 Dont il erent tuit si joiant
 Et a fester si manoiant
 Qu'en cascune vile, en cent lieus,

Veïssiés manieres de jeus
 Biaus et plaisans et honerables
 Et a regarder delitables. (vv 7966-76)

Clearly, in shaping the reception of his romance, Philippe has a powerful ally in the voice of the inscribed public. This voice not only allows him to suggest appropriate responses to Joïc's story, it also enables him to deflect any criticism that his solidarity with Joïc can be construed as an attack against the rules of society. It is significant that when the crowd criticises the King of Scotland, the authorial voice intervenes to remind the inscribed public that it should be criticising the Dowager Queen.

That the crowd can function so effectively is largely due to the fact that it is excluded from direct participation in the action and thus remains external to the story. The people of Hungary or Scotland offer no confrontation, no threat of social disturbance, violence or insurrection. But in successive temporal sequences, in different realms, the crowd's disapproval of the wrongs committed against Joïc is patent. The people's clear moral vision contrasts with the moral blindness of the King of Hungary; the crowd remains rational while the King of Scotland lingers irrationally in France. While the reaction of the two Kings' subordinates may be explained in terms of expediency, lack of political autonomy or their legitimate fears for their own safety, the crowd reacts spontaneously and positions itself on the side of right; it speaks with the voice of moral authority. Thus Philippe uses the inscribed public to establish a relationship between himself and his implied public. The crowd is his mouthpiece, the embodiment of his opinion. As a dramatic device, the crowd functions as an "ideal spectator."⁶

From this brief analysis of Philippe de Remy's narrative strategies, we glean a considerable amount of information about the author himself. In some respects, Philippe appears as a man of his times. We note, for example, the profound piety that inspired his transforming a folktale into an edifying Christian exemplum, preaching trust in God. We note, also, his hatred of treachery, expressed forcibly in those segments of the romance that revolve around the Dowager Queen (vv 4528-42). We can infer, too, from his diatribe against drunkenness (vv 3399-3402), occasioned by the messenger's getting so drunk that the letters can be exchanged, that he despised those who over-indulged in drink. In other respects, however, we may marvel that Philippe adopts an authorial position at variance with that of his society. By choosing a female protagonist, Joïc, and then portraying her in a favourable light, he rejects

the reification of the woman practised by the patriarchy, which reduces her to an “object of exchange.” And through his evident sympathy for her predicament, he implicitly criticises the church and the aristocracy who willingly sanction an incestuous marriage for the sake of producing an heir to the throne. Thus Philippe positions himself in the margins of conventional society.

We may also marvel at the skill of an author who states in the prologue to his work that he has never previously written a single line. Jean Dufournet has noted the frequent authorial interventions in the text, the interest in the characters’ psychology and enthusiasm for moral dilemmas, characteristic of thirteenth-century romance.⁷ As we have seen, Philippe does not hesitate to intervene in his romance, guiding the listener or reader with his comments on characters and events and thereby shaping the reception of his work. Even more important than the narrative voice in this romance is the voice of the inscribed public, the “ideal spectator” who functions as intermediary between Philippe and his implied public and who plays a vital role in conveying the dramatic effect. Taken together, these narrative devices empower Philippe, allowing him to defuse the dialectic tensions that spring from his unconventional authorial position. Still, we cannot fail to notice that before the conclusion of the romance, Philippe restores the usual social order and re-positions Joïe within the patriarchy.⁸

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Notes

1 In Suchier, ed. *Oeuvres poétiques de Philippe de Remi, Sire de Beaumanoir*. All quotations from *La Manekine* are taken from this edition. *La Manekine* is also available in a modern French prose translation by Marchello-Nizia.

2 The folktale is discussed at length by Bernier. Other accounts include Harf-Lancner, a chapter entitled “The Handless Maiden” in Pinkola Estés’ *Women Who Run with the Wolves* and a special issue of *Western Folklore*, focusing on the “Innocent Persecuted Heroine” folktales, including “The Maiden Without Hands” (52.1, January 1993). For an account of the blend of courtliness and folktale motifs, see Harvey, 1997.

3 Dufournet notes Philippe’s obsession with situations that are out of the ordinary: «En effet, il a écrit une oeuvre qu’on sent hantée par les situations limites, à différents points de vue. Social: le pauvre chevalier épouse la riche héritière dans *Jehan et Blonde*. Moral: tout le début de *La Manekine* est fondé sur la menace de l’inceste.

Littéraire: Philippe recourt au jargon franco-anglais dans *Jehan et Blonde* et invente la poésie du non-sens dans les *Oiseuses* et les *Fatrasies*» (Dufournet 28).

4 The King of Scotland dubs her “Manekine,” explaining that it is because she has only one hand (cf. Modern French *manchote*). Marchello-Nizia provides an alternative explanation for the name, «on peut y voir la forme féminine de *mannequin* (diminutif de *Mann*, “l’homme” dans les langues germaniques) et ce mot désignait au Moyen Age la figure de paille ou de bois, l’espèce de pantin qui, dans les représentations des mystères, remplaçait l’acteur dans les scènes de supplice; or par deux fois, on brûle à sa place une statue sculptée à sa ressemblance» (Marchello-Nizia 256).

5 A comprehensive analysis of Joie’s character is found in Harvey, 1995.

6 The term “ideal spectator” or “*idealisierte Zuschauer*” is borrowed from German classical scholarship on tragedy (Gardiner 2 n2). Although Gardiner demonstrates that for Sophocles, each chorus “represents a group of persons...who are a part of society that is deeply involved in the action and its outcome” (191), Philippe’s crowd is closer to the simpler construct of “ideal spectator.”

7 “L’intervention fréquente de l’auteur dans la matière qu’il traite: il commente les actions et les pensées de ses personnages; de là un souci marqué de psychologie et une prédilection pour les conflits moraux...” (Dufournet 27).

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