

## The Aesthetic and the Dramatic in Philippe de Rémi's Verse Romances\*

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Until recently, the works of Philippe de Rémi, sire de Beaumanoir, were known chiefly through Hermann Suchier's nineteenth-century edition of the manuscript.<sup>1</sup> Philippe's two verse romances, *La Manekine* (c. 1230–1240) and the later *Jehan et Blonde*, have now become more widely known through the publication of versions in modern French.<sup>2</sup> Both can be considered as typical initiation romances, to the extent that the stories of Joïe, the protagonist of *La Manekine*, and Jehan, hero of *Jehan et Blonde*, span several years, bringing them from adolescence into adulthood, marriage, and an established position in society.<sup>3</sup> Beyond this superficial categorization, one noteworthy feature of both narratives is that their French author chose to set various segments across the Channel, in Scotland and in England.<sup>4</sup> Such "exotic" elements as the Anglo-Norman dialect or Scottish customs unquestionably demonstrate Philippe's skill at weaving strands of local colour into the texture of his romances. They also merit attention as narrative strategies. This article will examine the episodes situated in England or Scotland, exploring their variations and their aesthetic or dramatic function within the respective narrative frameworks. First, however, a brief summary of the

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romances will serve to indicate those segments that take place across the Channel.

*La Manekine* starts in Hungary, where the King arranges to marry his daughter, Joïe, to replace his dead wife. When Joïe cuts off her left hand to escape the incestuous union, the King is so infuriated that he orders her to be burnt alive. However, thanks to a compassionate seneschal, she is instead cast 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. She inspires the love of the courtly young King of Scotland who, despite his mother’s antagonism toward her, marries her. The King’s subsequent absence exposes Joïe to the Dowager Queen’s evil machinations and, to save her life, she must flee Scotland.

Cast adrift a second time, she lands in Rome. On his return, the King of Scotland discovers what has transpired and, after punishing his mother, sets out to find his wife. Fully seven years later, he arrives in Rome at Easter, at the same time as the now-repentant King of Hungary. All are then reunited and reconciled and Joïe’s hand, preserved intact in the belly of a sturgeon, is miraculously restored by the Pope. The King of Scotland is recognized as the heir to Hungary and, through Joïe, to Armenia, following which the royal couple returns to live in Scotland.

The setting of *Jehan et Blonde* alternates between the Beauvaisis in France (Philippe de Rémi’s region) and the south of England. Whereas Joïe arrives in Scotland by accident, twenty-year-old Jehan, the oldest son of the impoverished lord of Dammartin, makes a conscious decision to seek his fortune in England. Entering the service of the Earl of Oxford, he becomes the squire of the latter’s daughter, Blonde. Despite initial vicissitudes, due largely to the difference in their station, Jehan and Blonde fall in love and remain happily but secretly in love for two years. This idyllic situation is interrupted only when Jehan is summoned back to France, to his father’s deathbed. The lovers agree that he will return to Oxford one year hence to claim Blonde as his wife and take her back to Dammartin.

In the meantime the Earl of Oxford arranges to marry his daughter to the wealthy Earl of Gloucester. Jehan arrives back just in time to carry Blonde off to Dover, and, eluding his rival, escapes with her to France, where their marriage is celebrated. Shortly thereafter, King Louis decides to knight Jehan and make him Count of Dammartin. He also intercedes with the Earl of Oxford, so that all are reconciled and reunited for the ceremony, which takes place at Dammartin at Pentecost.

In both romances, Philippe clearly shows considerable knowledge of the geography of England and Scotland. In *La Manekine*, Scotland's location is specified as "une tere / Qui est par devers Engleterre" [a land close to England, lines 1169–70] and three of its principal cities are named: Dundee, Perth, and Berwick-upon-Tweed. Dundee is cited as the usual residence of the King of Scotland and his court, and the place where they settle at the end:

Sejourner vinrent a Dondieu.  
 Car c'estoit d'Escoce le lieu  
 U Joïe amoit miex manoir. (lines 8507–09)

[They came to settle in Dundee, for that was Joïe's favourite place to live in all Scotland.]

Perth, which Philippe correctly locates seven leagues from Dundee (lines 2315–16), is the home of the Dowager Queen. As for Berwick, the name of this port might well be known to Philippe's audience in the Beauvaisis, for from the twelfth century onward it was an important trading centre with links to towns such as Bruges and Saint-Omer.<sup>5</sup> Commercial interests between France and Scotland were further strengthened by political bonds (such as the friendship between Philip of Flanders and William I of Scotland) and by the links formed by religious orders (for example, Augustinians from Beauvais were to be found in the Scottish Border town of Jedburgh in the twelfth century) (Shepherd 54, n.21).<sup>6</sup>

Berwick is the port where Joïe lands, after nine days at sea. Philippe states that it is the first Sunday of Lent, "jour des Brandons" or Firebrand Day, a day of the year when the inhabitants of Berwick gather on the shore for their traditional celebrations of dancing and making merry:

Trestout droit le jour des brandons  
 Les gens de Beruïch estoient  
 Sur la mer, ou il se jouoient. (lines 1172–74)

[On Firebrand Day itself the people of Berwick were celebrating on the sea shore.]

These have been tentatively identified as the Beltane Fire festivities, marking the passage from winter to spring (Shepherd 53). This festival, once common to all the Celtic nations, became associated with various festivals or rites of the Christian church year following the spread of Christianity. Introduced by Philippe into a narrative that he himself qualifies as a Christian *exemplum*, these celebrations serve as an indication that despite the surface familiarity

and common interests between France and Scotland, differences are to be found in the Celtic world to which Scotland belongs.

In fact, Philippe continually identifies Scotland as part of the Celtic world: the King tells Joïe that when they are married, Scotland, Ireland, and Cornwall will belong to her:

Tous li païs qui environne,  
Escoce, Yrlande, Cornouaille,  
Sera vostre sans nule faille.  
Sires en serai, et vous dame. (lines 1944–47)

[The whole country round about — Scotland, Ireland, and Cornwall, will be yours without fault. I shall be lord of the realm and you its lady.]

The nobles of these countries are summoned to a Pentecost feast celebrating the wedding of the King of Scotland with Joïe (lines 2083–88) and, several years later, to the festivities occurring on their return to Scotland (lines 8337–42). It would seem that Philippe is capitalizing on the continuing interest of the French public for the Celtic world, an interest shown by the thirteenth-century prose *Tristan* and the continuing popularity of Arthurian material such as the legend of the Grail.

The geography of the South of England is equally well known to Philippe de Rémi. Crossing the Channel from Boulogne to Dover, Jehan proceeds to London, “Ou ert d’Englès li parlemens” [where the English parliament was, line 121] and travels with the Earl to his castle in Oxford. However, the aesthetic function of England in *Jehan et Blonde* is quite different, since this country is the traditional rival and often the enemy of France. Indeed, one may wonder whether Philippe is not indulging in wishful thinking when, with the marriage of Jehan and Blonde, sanctioned by King Louis of France, he symbolically unites England and France under French rule. It certainly seems only natural that, to establish the desired complicity between author and audience, Philippe should incorporate images that show the English in an unfavourable light compared to the French. And it is not surprising that, at a time when French speakers were increasingly conscious of the pure form of their language, the Anglo-Norman dialect spoken in England should be a frequent target. In *Jehan et Blonde*, as in satirical poems and songs, the fabliau *Des deux Anglois et de l’anel*, or the story of Renard the Fox disguised as a travelling entertainer from England, the “faux français d’Angleterre” is a source of mockery.

Philippe introduces the topos with considerable subtlety. He portrays the Earl of Oxford as a sympathetic character who understands when Jehan addresses him in French, for he has studied the language in France:

En son Francois [Jehans] l'a saluë,  
 Et li quens n'i a deluë  
 (Que le Francois seut bien entendre,  
 En France eut esté pour aprendre). (lines 129–32)

[Jehan greeted him in French and the count had no difficulty understanding him (he understood the language well, for he had been to France to learn it).]

This is in accord with the prestige of French, which, though no longer a mother tongue in thirteenth-century England, remained the mark of an educated, cultured person.<sup>7</sup> The Earl's daughter Blonde is the typical courtly heroine of French romance. In this regard, the *descriptio puellae* functions as an aesthetic marker, for the long and glowing portrait of Blonde includes all the standard features of physical and moral beauty. However, notes Philippe, with a trace of irony, you could tell from her language that she wasn't born in Pontoise: "Un peu paroit a son langage / Que ne fu pas nee a Pontoise" (lines 358–59). And it is thanks to Jehan, the young squire from France, that her French improves:

De maint jeu a juër l'aprist,  
 Et en milleur Francois le mist  
 Qu'ele n'estoit quant a li vint,  
 Par quoi ele mout chier le tint. (lines 403–06)

[Thanks to him, she learnt how to play many games and spoke French better than when he arrived, so she was very friendly toward him.]

Thus, manoeuvring in the available discursive spaces, Philippe implies that, despite the difference in rank between the landless Jehan and the wealthy Blonde, the young Frenchman does have some advantages.

But nowhere is the superiority of the French over the English more explicitly demonstrated than in Philippe's portrayal of Jehan's rival, the Earl of Gloucester, whose Anglo-Norman dialect becomes, as Elisabeth Schulze-Busacker observes, "a topos of stupid behaviour" (39). His untutored and inadequate French, interspersed with English words, mirrors his lack of courtliness; his bad grammar expresses his bad manners as he mocks Jehan:

"Amis, bien fustes vous vené!  
 "Comment fu vostre non pelé?"  
 .....  
 "Gautier? Diable! ce fu non sot." (lines 2639–40, 2643)

[“Welcome, friend! What is your name? . . . Gautier? Hell, that’s a silly name.”]

Ultimately, his inability to understand Jehan’s riddles leads to his undoing, for he loses Blonde to his younger, more intelligent and polished French rival. Clearly, in his capacity as narrator, Philippe guides his audience with skill and finesse, controlling the narration.

In addition to the aesthetic functions of contributing to local colour, marking difference or conveying the discourse of satire, these episodes set over the Channel are crucial to the sequence of narrative events. In *La Manekine*, Joïe’s arrival in Scotland signals a fresh start. Refusing to divulge her name or her identity, she nonetheless proves herself as a woman whose courtliness is enriched by her Christian principles. In this respect, the loss of selfhood that her loss of name reflects by no means diminishes her. Indeed, her qualities are so great that she overcomes the problems presented by her mutilation, poverty, and anonymity to become the bride of the King of Scotland. Viewed in this light, the Scottish episode sees her triumph over her trials and tribulations and regain her regal status. It seems that the love of the King of Scotland will enable Joïe to fulfil the promise of her emblematic name:

Bien doi amer, car en mon non  
 Voi ge raison que doie amer;  
 Enne me doit on apeler  
 En non de baptesme Joïe?  
 Joïe autrestant senefie  
 Comme d’amours avoir la joïe. (lines 1776–81)

[Indeed, I should love, for I can see in my name that I am meant to love. Should I not be called by my baptismal name, Joïe? And does not “Joïe” mean knowing the joys of love?]

However, she also incurs the hatred of the Dowager Queen who, in the absence of the King, contrives to get Manekine condemned to the stake, together with her infant son. Her life in Scotland ends as it had begun: saved by the seneschal, she is cast adrift at Berwick in the very boat without sails or rudder in which she had arrived. She had arrived on the first Sunday of Lent and Lent is again approaching as she departs.

While the repetition of narrative events reinforces the dramatic, from unjust condemnation to escape, the circularity of the episode recalls the circularity of the wheel of Fortune. Joïe made brief reference to this after her escape from Hungary:

Fortune, mout malement  
 M'as tost ta roee bestournee.  
 Desseure m'avoies montee,  
 Ou j'avoie joie et soulas.  
 Or m'est vis de si haut si bas  
 Gietee m'as desous tes piés,  
 Ne de moi ne te prent pitié. (lines 1084–90)

[Fortune, how cruelly you have turned your wheel. You had placed me at the top, where I was happy and carefree. Now you have cast me down to the bottom, at your feet, yet you show me no pity.]

Her amplification of this motif (lines 4636–724) as she leaves Scotland is not only a rhetorical technique but a crucial element in the generation and elaboration of narrative material. Philippe uses it to suggest that, despite the apparent closure, the wheel will continue to turn and Manekine may return to Scotland.

When she does land in Scotland again, she has recovered her identity both as wife of the King of Scotland and daughter of the King of Hungary, and is once more known by the name of Joïe. Not only is she accompanied by her husband and son, but all the dignitaries of Ireland, Scotland, and Cornwall are on hand to celebrate their arrival. When Joïe had originally landed in Scotland on the first Sunday of Lent, Philippe had described the local customs. This time, it is Easter and the traditional offices of the holy Catholic church, mass and communion, are observed. By means of these contrasts, Philippe seems to underline that moral harmony has now been restored. Joïe has an established place in society, within a marriage approved of by God and man.

Though marriage is a central concern in *Jehan et Blonde* also, Jehan's initial reason for crossing the Channel is to seek his fortune, "Pour preu et pour honnour conquerre" [to win valour and honour, line 46.] According to the sequence and chronology of events established by Sylvie Lécuyer,<sup>8</sup> Jehan's sojourn in England, as a squire in the service of the household of the Earl of Oxford, lasts two years and seven months. During this time he falls in love with Blonde, but despairing of winning her hand because of the difference in their station, he languishes and becomes deathly ill, prey to the physical and psychological sufferings of love. However, when he does confess his love to Blonde, she promises that if he recovers she will be his lady-love. Although Jehan recovers, Blonde does not keep her promise because of the difference in rank. Perfidious Albion! It is only when Jehan falls ill a second

time and is near death that she realizes the depths of his love and, with a kiss, restores him to life.

This repetition of narrative events underlines the motifs of courtliness such as the lover's sickness, the lady's indifference and the various obstacles to their love. On the one hand, viewed in this context, England functions as the *locus amoenus*, where Jehan and Blonde meet and, after the initial difficulties, for the next two years enjoy a secret love affair. On the other hand, in terms of Jehan's quest for fame and fortune, England is still the land of opportunity. It is noteworthy that Jehan does not admit his love for Blonde to his dying father but confides more ambiguously that

. . . grant partie  
 Quide de son voloir aquerre  
 Outre la mer en Engleterre. (lines 2082–84)

[he believes that he will achieve many of his ambitions over the sea, in England.]

Nevertheless, this first sojourn in England shows primarily Jehan's courtly qualities, which win him the love of Blonde: his initial timorous behaviour, then his loyal and faithful service of his lady, his discretion and ability to please her.

His second visit requires different qualities, for on arrival he learns that Blonde is officially promised to the Earl of Gloucester. Jehan immediately proves to be decisive and daring, intelligent and resourceful. He elopes with Blonde, flees to Dover pursued by Gloucester and his men, whom he defeats in armed combat, and then sets sail with Blonde to France, where their marriage is celebrated. Thus this brief second visit to England is of considerable importance both for the development of narrative events and for demonstrating Jehan's qualities as a man of valour.

At the end, Jehan's experiences in England have indeed won him the fame and fortune he set out to attain. As Francis Dubost has recently pointed out,<sup>9</sup> Philippe de Rémi stresses Jehan's success in material terms: "Deus contés out et femme bele" [He owned two counties and a beautiful woman, line 6146] and again, "Jehans conquest par son savoir / S'amie et grant plenté d'avoir" [Through his ability, Jehan won his lady and considerable wealth, lines 6239–40.] Unfortunately, Blonde herself is reduced in this way to a mere object to be conquered in the same way as material goods.

In conclusion, the functions of the episodes set in Scotland and England are many and various. Primary differences between these episodes in

*La Manekine* and *Jehan et Blonde* stem from the particular set of socio-political realities to which each romance is attuned, since France's cordial relations with Scotland are very different from its rivalry with England. As narrative strategies, the episodes encompass both the aesthetic and the dramatic: in addition to conveying local colour, they may satisfy the French vogue for the Celtic world, flatter a French sense of superiority over the English, serve to foreground character or provide a background for the protagonists' adventures and misadventures. Most important, the conflation of the aesthetic and the dramatic shapes Philippe's verse romances. England is the *locus amoenus* where love blossoms between Jehan et Blonde, driving narrative events to their happy conclusion. Scotland is the country where Manekine first recovers a partial identity as wife of the King of Scotland and eventually settles to live out the destiny of her emblematic name, Joie.

Philippe de Rémi's detailed knowledge of the geography of both countries has led several critics to comment on the probability of his having spent time there as a young man (Dubost 404, n.4). While it is impossible to affirm that as narrator he could authenticate the experience of Jehan, it is safe to say that the romances are to a certain degree the record of his travels.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In *Oeuvres poétiques de Philippe de Rémi, Sire de Beaumanoir*. All quotations from *La Manekine* and *Jehan et Blonde* are taken from Suchier's edition; translations into English are my own.

<sup>2</sup> *La Manekine* is translated into modern French by Christiane Marchello-Nizia, *Jehan et Blonde*, by Sylvie Lécuyer.

<sup>3</sup> For *La Manekine*, see Castellani, "L'eau dans *La Manekine* de Philippe de Beaumanoir," 84-87.

<sup>4</sup> This has led various critics to conclude that "Sometime during his youth, Philippe visited England and Scotland; a considerable knowledge of the island's geography appears in his poetry" (*Scribner's Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, p. 144).

<sup>5</sup> A thorough discussion of the geography of both romances is found in Shepherd, *Tradition and Re-creation in Thirteenth Century Romance*, chapter 2. For the importance of Berwick, see pp. 52-53.

<sup>6</sup> For political ties, Shepherd cites Rickard, *Britain in Medieval French Literature 1100-1500*, p. 112. His source for religious links is Ritchie's Zaharoff Lecture for 1952, *Chrétien de Troyes and Scotland*.

<sup>7</sup> According to Dor, in "Langues française et anglaise, et multilinguisme à l'époque d'Henri II Plantagenêt," in the twelfth century French was already losing ground as a mother tongue in England. For a detailed account of the relative position of French

and English throughout the Middle Ages, see Short, "On Bilingualism in Anglo-Norman England."

<sup>8</sup> A useful chronological table showing the sequence and duration of narrative events in the romance is provided in "L'espace et le temps dans *Jehan et Blonde*," pp. 58–62.

<sup>9</sup> In his article Dubost states: "la femme est rejetée dans la catégorie grammaticale de l'objet, mais aussi dans la catégorie existentielle de l'objet 'à conquérir' et à posséder, selon une éthique imprégnée de la volonté de parvenir. Cette éthique n'est plus seulement affirmation de l'être; elle intègre désormais d'autres valeurs d'appropriation en particulier, et s'oriente vers les grandeurs d'établissement et d'enrichissement. Philippe de Rémi entend ouvrir son roman à une autre aventure que l'aventure d'aimer" (p. 404).

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