Understanding the Patriarchy of the Anglo-Normans

Finke and Shichtman's essay "Magical Mistress Tour: Patronage, Intellectual Property, and the Dissemination of Wealth in the *Lais* of Marie de France" describes the two different systems for the transmission of property residing in the patriarchy of the Anglo-Normans: primogeniture and patronage. By looking at the examples and analyses in the essay, readers can see the connection between the historical context of twelfth-century Europe and Marie de France's *Lanval.*

Primogeniture, or patrimony, is the custom of which property and wealth from the father are inherited by his first-born son. This system allows for the continuity of wealth in the bloodline; however, this same system limits social mobility. This patrimonial practice is still protected today with the social institution of marriage. Patronage is a system in which a patron and a client form a complex, private relationship that distributes wealth among predominantly men. "While primogeniture created fictions of permanence and continuity, patronage created elaborate networks of male-male relations that emphasized discontinuity, change, and mobility" (Finke and Shichtman 481). Patronage solidified relationships between men with their gain and exchange of women as their property. However, in Finke and Shichtman's essay, the audience learns that Marie de France was involved in the patronage system; William Marshal being her most probable patron. The role of women in the patronage system was often equivalent to property; however, women could sometimes be a part of the institution as clients, and even as patrons, like Marie de France.

Married, aristocratic women could become involved in the patronage as they mediated among men. This role's relevance was caused by the panic and rumors that young knights were initiating in homosexual actions in the twelfth century, i.e., sodomy. Many young knights

participating in patronage would often band together in groups as they would both give and receive gifts out of appreciation for one another. In Finke and Shichtman's essay, they point out that there was a fine line between homosocial relationships and homoerotic relationships. In the romance genre, the relationships between men had to be mediated or mitigated as the queen became an erotic surrogate. In the reality of Europe during this time, wives could also serve as replacements for their husbands; however, they did not participate erotically; they could complete their duties by being a civil servant or even running an estate.

Marie de France's *Lanval* critiques the conventional masculine economy of patronage by including an all-powerful Fairy Queen who becomes Lanval's patron and granting him limitless riches as well as her body. The poet describes the mysterious woman as having more wealth than anyone. Either Queen Semiramis or the emperor Octavian "could not have paid for one of the flaps" (86). This inclusion of a woman patron, who holds the wealth and power that typically would belong to a man, reverses the social norms of the period.

Lanval also includes the competition for Lanval's love between the Fairy Queen and Arthur's queen Guinevere. When Lanval refuses the queen's advances, she becomes angry and accuses him of homosexuality. "People have often told me / that you have no interest in women. / You have fine-looking boys / with whom you enjoy yourself" (280-282). The queen's reaction to Lanval's rejection is Marie de France's way of poking fun at the courtly love triangle that appeared in the patronage system and the fear that bachelor knights were committing sodomy. Much like Marie de France, women writers are empowered to create freely. The magic that the Fairy Queen possesses in Mare de France's *Lanval* is symbolic of Marie de France's limitless imagination. In *Lanval*, the Fairy Queen has "inexhaustible power" and wealth, mirroring the endless imagination and creativity that Marie de France and other women writers possess (Finke

and Shichtman 495). Marie de France, in a sense, establishes herself in the story of *Lanval* as she includes the Fairy Queen as a representation of herself. “He would never again want anything, / he would receive as he desired; / however generously he might give and spend, / she would provide what he needed” (*Lanval* 136-139). This limitless imagination, or magic, allows female writers to escape from the reality of the hold that the patriarchy has on them. Women authors and Marie de France are able to bestow their gifts to others, much like the Fairy Queen bestows gifts to her client Lanval.

Finke and Shichtman’s essay highlights parts of Marie de France’s *Lanval* and explains the historical context within the time period the poem was thought to be written. Their analysis of the text allows us to better understand the text and the history behind it. The essay stays relatively focused on its thesis. “At the same time, however, her considerable largess suggests a model of empowerment (even if it is only a fantasy) for women in medieval society, especially for learned women and artists like Marie” (495). Originally, I did not make the connection between Marie de France and the Fairy Queen. Finke and Shichtman’s essay gives evidence that persuades me to believe the Fairy Queen and her magic are a symbol of Marie de France and her imagination or intellectual property. However, the authors seem to go off on a tangent while justifying why William Marshal was Marie de France’s patron. I think the inclusion that Marie de France’s probable patron is William Marshal without the drawn-out explanation would have sufficed.

Works Cited

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