Jehan de Saintré the anonymous lady

Jehan de Saintré and the Anonymous Lady[1]

Jane Bliss

des amours de une dame des Belles Cousines ...
et du tresvaillant chevalier le sire de Saintré (§1).[2]

This study explores La Sale's use of naming as part of his narrative strategy in *Jehan de Saintré*; naming-patterns comment strongly on the role of the heroine, and in addition problematize the work's genre. The *roman* displays a marked disparity between the first and longer part, a courtly/chivalric account of the hero's development, and the second part, a very unchivalric story of the heroine and the abbot. *Saintré* is a text that mixes genres; the problem of reconciling the two kinds of story challenges criticism and invites a variety of readings.[3] Critics discuss *Saintré* in terms of romance and fabliau:[4] Jeay discusses critics' varying attempts to classify the work.[5] Crosby suggests a model for novelists of the nineteenth century; for Quéruel the work evades classification.[6] Jeay argues that La Sale 'a cherché à rompre avec la linéarité ...', quoting Kristeva's phrase 'une mosaïque de discours'.[7] They acknowledge that there is generic slippage, and attempt to demonstrate the work's underlying coherence. Thus Dubuis reads the work as a 'roman d'apprentissage', thereby solving its 'manque de homogénéité'; Morse, however, believes La Sale's intentions are 'almost impossible to recover'.[8]

Further to, and perhaps consequently upon, this problem of finding the work's coherence, the *roman* is often read as critical of the heroine. The editor finds her long lessons 'insupportable' (p. 7) and her enterprise shameful ('une création honteuse,' p. 9). Dubuis judges her to be 'profondément égoïste'; her fragile love for the hero loses, when tested, to her 'orgueil'.[9] Taylor argues that she hampers the hero's development, and calls her 'a vulgar piece'.[10] All this is borne out by the fact that La Sale begins the narrative by hinting about her future disgrace, and ends it by crowing over her downfall. But despite his ostentatious disapproval, there are indications that he is not entirely without sympathy for her.[11] He makes the reader rethink character-stereotyping,[12] by showing how different the anonymous female looks in different kinds of story; he shows the lady both as transgressor and as victim.

The nameless Madame, who is the only character common to the two contrasting worlds of the *roman*, makes an unexpected move from one kind of

story into another. The shocking later episodes are prepared not only by the author's sly warnings but also by his refusal to name the central female character: this namelessness means that she is both a courtly lady, whose name must be kept secret, and also a type or personification of frailty. La Sale uses contrasting story-genres, but the heroine's anonymity is always central. This is strongly emphasized by a disparity, in the way all other characters are named, between the two main sections. To read *Saintré* against the many medieval romances where name, or lack of name, is crucial to the story is a step towards finding a key to understanding this disparity.

Namelessness is a characteristic of the fabliau genre. But a special interest in, and manipulation of, both naming and namelessness is a typical feature of the romance genre.[13] By stressing the historical tone of the early part, and by the unchivalric (unromantic) later part, La Sale seems to distance his work from romance. But his interest in naming and anonymity continually pulls it towards romance. His use of naming-patterns evokes heroes and heroines of courtly, chivalric, even magical worlds; these act as foil for his own protagonists.[14] My aim is to analyze the naming-patterns of *Saintré* to show how they enable (oblige) the central character, Madame, to span two episodes that appear to be two different genres.

The genre of romance has been notoriously difficult to define. Some scholars make use of the family-resemblance model, as a tool for thinking about romances rather than for categorizing them. By this model, romances contain a critical number of themes:[15] typically these are love, chivalry, adventures, and the marvellous. An interest in naming is also a crucial feature of many romances. Furthermore, romance – even outside those texts that take name as theme – is able to play with naming whereas other genres, with relatively stable naming-patterns, are not. Because it is concerned more with *how* name means (that is, what name or lack of name does for the story) than with *what* names mean, romance is broadly nominalist. For example, Lancelot's name is delayed (in the *Charrette*), Gawain's name is lost or forgotten (in *L'Âtre Périlleux*), Ipomedon's identity is variously hidden; the *meaning* of these names is neither given nor sought. The familiar medieval etymologizing, common in genres such as hagiography, is realist: it claims to demonstrate the real essence or meaning in a person's name. But in romance the important question, often, is simply whether a character has a name or not. Frequency of naming varies substantially across the range of romances in both French and English, both early and late. But those containing many names (from the *Romance of Horn* to Malory) are often linked in style and conception to chronicle history, which cannot be written without names. Medieval writers, as early as Gaimar (who predates Chrétien) and as late as La Sale, are aware of naming and of its themes and its patterns, and use it as a tool for story-telling. Furthermore, they use it in ways that suggest awareness and

manipulation of genre. It is noticeable that frequency of naming, in Gaimar's early vernacular chronicle, drops off as the narrative moves into a romance-like tale of Aveloc;[16] a dramatic shift from biblical to historical time in Robert de Boron's *Merlin* is enhanced by a shift from no names to many.[17] In such cases the transition from one kind of story to another may be prepared explicitly by an author's refusal to name a character, or by other provocative play with names. Techniques such as name-play, allusions to named characters in other texts, and ludic anonymity, occur far more abundantly in romances than in other medieval narratives. However, anonymity is a notable feature of short narrative genres, such as the fabliau,[18] which typically contain few or no names. Fabliaux resemble pub-stories of today in that they are frequently subversive or anti-feminist. Their humour is often cruel and – salacious without being sexy – they often suggest a moral.

Naming is a key for differentiating between genres: in romance naming-strategies dominate, and its naming-patterns differ sharply from those of fabliau, hagiography, and chronicle. Whether *Jehan de Saintré* is to be categorized as romance or not,[19] I shall show that romance naming-patterns appear in both La Sale's style and, by demonstrating how they allow us to differentiate between sections, also in his structure. He could not but have been very familiar, writing in fifteenth-century France, with the romance genre and its conventions. He uses intertextual reference to frame the work, deliberate anonymity to create Madame's character, and conventional naming-frequency to differentiate story-worlds. I shall set out how he manipulates these strategies, how he manipulates the topos of concealing a lady's name, and how he manipulates the title(s) of the work.

The first part of *Jehan de Saintré* resembles a chivalric biography, and virtually everybody, except the lady, has a name. The thirteen-year-old Jehan is chosen by a bored young widow, lady-in-waiting (Belle Cousine) to the queen, to be trained in the ways of knighthood and courtesy. She instructs him, advances him at Court, and arranges tournaments (even a crusade) in which he will gain prowess. The break comes when he arranges a knightly adventure for himself: she is furious, and so is the king, but there is no stopping him. Because the relationship has been kept secret all this time, nobody has any idea of the real reason for Madame's departure for her home estates. The second part of the *roman* resembles a fabliau, or 'conte à rire' (comic, although not in verse);[20] all the characters here, except visitors from Court, are nameless. The lady begins an affair with the local abbot, ignoring the queen's pleas for her return. Saintré eventually arrives to look for her, but she is cold to him and the abbot mortally insults him. Two fights take place: first, the young hero comes off ludicrously the worse in a wrestling match. Then he tricks the abbot into donning armour and thrashes him, finally stabbing him in the face. The episode culminates with Saintré stripping the lady of her blue girdle, because she is not fit to wear the colour of chastity. In the concluding section, a third genre

is utilized: the hero summarizes the whole plot so far in a letter supposed to have come from a friend. He reads this letter aloud to the Court, and invites the audience's judgement on the lady described therein. It resembles a parable or exemplum in its two-fold aim, to provoke comment or discussion (as in a 'demande d'amour') and to press home a moral. La Sale is at pains to point out that it contains no names at all.

By juxtaposing three kinds of narrative (biographical, comic, and exemplary), he is able to write Madame out of the text altogether: she is respected and powerful in the first part of the story, she is ridiculed in the second part, and in the third part she is reduced to a moral cipher before disappearing altogether. This programme is confirmed by the author's naming-strategies at each stage, as will be seen.

La Sale gestures towards romance by framing the work with references to Lancelot. He is the first of the heroes, a type whose love inspires prowess, invoked by Madame as she begins her teaching (§6). At the end of the story, Saintré is aligned with the knight whose tomb was predestined for him (§177, n. 125).[21] In keeping with the traditional mystery surrounding Lancelot's name, La Sale sees no need to state it here; readers are expected to pick up the intertextual reference to the famous knight. But any expectation, in *Saintré,* of a hero's uninterrupted rise to fame is frustrated: the climax is very unchivalric, and both protagonists disappear abruptly at the end. La Sale's gesture towards romance suggests a mirror in which his own *roman* appears as anti-romance, because Saintré does not match up to Lancelot. It also suggests that La Sale wants to show his work as having something else in common with romance: his narrative, like romance, is shaped by naming-patterns, and preoccupation with naming and anonymity is the thread connecting disparate parts of the whole. The author's refusal to name selected characters in his work is echoed, within the work, by the hero's refusal to name the characters in his bogus letter.

La Sale manipulates the lady's anonymity in a variety of ways, and it is marked even before the beginning of the Court narrative. Then, in a chivalric biography or other quasi-historical narrative one expects principal characters to be named: in the story of Saintré the principal lady is explicitly not named. In a comic short story, on the other hand, it is more usual for characters to be identified only by nouns. Examples are: the actress and the bishop, or the cock and the fox. Sometimes such figures are given type-names, as Paddy and Mick (Irish labourers), or Robin and Marion (idyllic pastoral lovers). The story of the lady and the abbot, however, is destabilized by the fact that the lady has arrived in it by having run away from the Court world. We know who she is, even though we do not know her name. The episode with the Abbé naturally affects a reader's take on *Saintré* as a whole, but it works the other way too: we rarely encounter a comic short story featuring a protagonist whose identity was both established and concealed for us long before it began. Were the lady named, the double narrative would be less effective: a

named lady is usually presented as though she were historical. The sense of Madame's mystery and ambiguity would be lost; the illusion would spoiled if we knew her name (even if the court still did not). As it is, the shock value is considerable: we see a lady who is nameless by one set of conventions – notionally, the traditional secrecy about a lady's name, but La Sale has already given it more weight than this – reappear in another kind of story with her namelessness suddenly re-interpreted: she is transformed into another kind of stereotype.

La Sale places his nameless heroine into one kind of narrative after another. She does not stand a chance; note the readings, by various scholars, cited in this essay: 'roman d'apprentissage' (the apprentice must grow away from his tutor); Pygmalion story (the creator must be punished). The secret *amie* identified, the fairy mistress seen or named: both lead to disaster. The Abbé's mistress is found out by her noble lover, the lady in the letter is roundly disgraced. In the end she *is* identified, in a most dramatic way: Saintré returns her girdle publicly, so that she is revealed to everybody in the Court audience. It is as though, meeting her other self (noble dame colliding with wicked femme), she were cancelled out; in any case she disappears so thoroughly that the revised title of La Sale's 'livre' deletes her (§178).

The author insists on her namelessness from the very first: 'sans aultre nom ne surnom' (without any other name or byname (§1)); 'de son nom et seignourie l'ystoire s'en taist, a cause de ce que aprés pourrez veoir' (history says nothing about her name or estate, because of what you shall see hereafter (§3)). He is already preparing another space for her. When the time comes for her to move into that space, his introduction to her 'païs' echoes those words: 'Or nous fault il icy laissier le nom ... de la terre et de son hostel ... car le histoire s'en tait, et, pour aucunes ... choses qui aprés vendront' (Now we must omit the name of her lands and manor. The story does not relate it, and, because of things that happened afterwards ... (§138)). The sneering tone stresses that Belle Cousine (a title) is not her real name; it suggests that she has a name, or had until she "lost" it, and he cannot or will not tell us what it is.[22] To argue that her name is Belle Cousine, because it identifies her, would be misleading: Enguerrand's wife Alienor is addressed as Belle Cousine by *her* queen (§74). It is quite clear from this that "Fair Cousin" is no more her name than "Fair Son" is Perceval's.

Chivalry, obsessed with 'renommée', needs names as history does: in a text whose author is, according to this editor, more 'heraut' than 'lettré', it is not surprising to find long lists of named knights complete with blazons and war-cries.[23] The Court names are a significant extra: La Sale takes care to name everybody in the earlier part of the narrative, thus strongly emphasizing the heroine's anonymity. Exceptions are nameless figures mentioned, as tokens (in speech); I discuss these separately below. The list includes her ladies, the craftsmen employed to provide Saintré's outfits, virtuous widows to be emulated by Madame,[24] heroes of other romances to be emulated by Saintré, heralds, enemy leaders, and the doctor. Even

the queen (usually just 'la royne') signs her name, Bonne, significantly in a letter *from* Court *to* Madame's 'païs' – Madame's reply is as if unsigned (§148).

Madame's anonymity (or cryptonymy) is further emphasized by the way she labels her young property. He bears his own name, and hers: colours and interlaced letters.[25] But the sign has no meaning, because nobody recognizes it – Madame makes sure of that. Several scenes feature this obstinately empty sign (§27, §29, §31), which is examined by everybody in vain to discover who it belongs to.

In the later section of the *roman*, the anonymity of characters in the Abbé's world becomes significant because it is set against a preceding narrative world which is full of names. Here, in Madame's home territory, nobody is named: not the abbot, son of a rich, unnamed, local bourgeois; not any one of his entourage. This is despite the appearance of quite a few nameable figures: chamberlain, prior, various monks and servants (I except those named ladies, and young Perrin, who follow Madame from Court), the abbot's gamekeepers, and his 'maistre d'ostel'.

The author uses another trick to emphasize deliberate anonymity: he places "So-and-so" in direct speech. When Madame asks to see the relics, the abbot shows them saying 'ces os ... de messeigneurs saint tel et tel, et sainte telle' ("the bones of my lords saint so-and-so, and my lady saint such-and-such", §139)). This could be part of an ostentatious ploy to conceal the Abbey's identity; named saints are invoked freely elsewhere in the text, especially George, Michael, and Denis – there is even a Saint Lancelot (§123). Saintré aptly swears by St Jacques when arranging for a suit of armour with the bourgeois Jacques (§167). Here is a rare example of a name in Madame's domain, but his name appears only as he is enlisted to help the Court faction. Named, he becomes Saintré's man; the matching asseveration underlines the fact.

But this trick, a discourse neither free nor indirect, appears elsewhere. Examples are found in the courtly part of the narrative, too. The first example is when Madame and her ladies are trying to tease the name of his non-existent sweetheart out of the unhappy thirteen-year-old: 'Est ce point telle, telle ne telle? ' Ysabel then tells Madame 'ce n'est nulle de celles que avez nommees' ("Is it this one, or that one? " ... "but it is none of those you have named" (§27)). But she has not *named* anybody. This emphasizes a rule of the love-game: 'cuidiez vous que ung vray amant doit ainssy publier le nom de sa dame?' ("Do you really think a true lover ought to proclaim his lady's name thus?" (§9)). A further example, however, is where Saintré lists the witnesses to his first chivalric vow: 'presens mes tresredoubtez seigneurs ... telz, telz et telz' ("Witness my most redoubtable lords these, those, and the others" (§48)). Given the enormous number of named knights in the text, it is strange that these names are withheld (they form the only significant group of unnamed figures in this part of the narrative, although they are merely tokens). At one point La Sale explicitly omits to name some knights for fear

of missing any by mistake (§122); this reinforces his claim to be a reliable chronicler. But overall he seems to be drawing attention to the fact that he may name or not as he pleases, irrespective of whether the 'ystoire' he claims to be following provides names or not. This in turn underlines his expressed liberty ('fainderay', or "I shall make believe", he says – §138) to invent a story of a very different kind, weaving it into the "historical" world of Saintré and his friend Bourcicault and their exploits in the days of King Jean (son of Philippe de Valois) and his queen Bonne de Bohême.

Madame is the only nameless figure at Court. Because mysterious, she resembles a 'fée éducatrice' in the early part of the story; then, like a 'fée amante', her name and her gifts must be kept a secret.[26] Here is another reason for a reader's sense of shock when she breaks away from the courtly world. And it is not only her namelessness that sets her apart: she has a sense of humour, but of the cruellest; she wants to train up a young knight (her lessons are impeccable), but has to trap him emotionally and financially; she is devout, but her most fervent prayers are to Notre Dame de Leesse (delight or pleasure); she falls in love with Saintré, but is devastated at his first independent action. After this, she tells the doctor she is homesick (§137); her desire to escape, from the company of happy lovers, is genuine. She does not leave Court intending to deceive Saintré with another man;[27] the narrator betrays sympathy by remarking that Saintré's guess, that she had gone to forget her pain, was right (§155).

Critics (including the editor) debating whether the book is an anti-romance, or critique of the chivalric, have noted that nevertheless Saintré comes out on top. However, he is *not* without fault: the king is very displeased with the hotheaded young man and his companions, who have planned their 'emprise' without first asking permission (§135); La Sale makes it plain that Saintré has broken an important rule. Readers unsympathetic to the lady have overlooked this point;[28] it is in fact possible to understand, even if not to excuse, her behaviour.

At the showdown with the Abbé, La Sale describes Saintré's fury: he stops just short of smacking Madame in the face (§170), and just short of killing his adversary (§171). It is hard to read this as a demonstration of Saintré's nobility.[29] What is more, the lesson he preaches to himself about the sin of murder recalls the lessons she gave him years ago, as well as her generosity to him. The reader is forced to remember that she made the triumphant knight what he is. A few pages later, at the start of Saintré's recital to the Court, the interpolated verse about Fortune (§175) is supposed to be about the suffering male lover, but it elicits sympathy for the lady by recalling the narrator's earlier prediction (§33) about Fortune turning her back on 'ceste amour': we are shown that Fortune has turned against the lady, too.

The whole Court is gathered to hear Saintré's version of what happened. The section-heading draws attention to the namelessness in the account to follow: 'sans riens nommer ...' (§175). Saintré naturally omits to mention his own fault in the

matter: although claiming to tell 'mot a mot', he says the knight went away 'par la voullenté de Fortune'.[30] He rounds off his bogus letter with a 'demande d'amour', asking the audience what they think of the lady's behaviour. Madame has been forced to return to Court.[31] She sits speechless while ladies, named one after another, pass judgement on the lady described in the letter. These are not her usual ladies – Jehanne, Katherine, Ysabel, and the rest seem to have vanished – and not one has the least sympathy with her. The men, it must be noted, are silent, 'Car aux hommes il ne appartenoit riens en dire' (This was not the place for men to speak). At last, finding her voice, she calls the knight 'tresmal gracieux' for taking the lady's girdle. Replying that he no longer wishes to be that man, he neatly identifies both her and himself – yet no names are named – by placing it in her lap. Because this dissociates him from her, it effectively wipes her out of La Sale's story. Thus at the end the author calls his book 'Saintré', as if Saintré's narrative had made her disappear, while Saintré re-inscribes himself as a noble knight in the narrative of King Jean's court: 'je ne vueil *plus* estre ce tresmal gracieux' ("I *no longer* wish to be that bad-mannered man." – §177, my emphasis). This too looks very like an admission that he had behaved badly.

La Sale's considerable literary output includes *Saintré* (c1456) with three companion-pieces,[32] dedicated to Jean d'Anjou (§1). Herald, soldier, and author, he was active at the courts of Anjou and Luxembourg. Therefore this collection, proposed in the prologue, suggests that La Sale may have wished *Saintré* to be read as courtly/chivalric, if not as historical.[33] In any case, its generic status has been much debated, as I have indicated. It is curious that this late "romance" has not the nostalgic feel of, say, Malory's *Morte Darthur*. This may be because its major selling-point was a triumph of chivalry (neither *quondam* nor *futurus*), as Taylor suggests in her study.[34] The work's title too, as it appears in the prologue, suggests that the author wanted it to be considered as courtly. The lady's name comes first: '... des amours de une dame des Belles Cousines de France, sans aultre nom ne surnom nommer, et du tresvaillant chevalier le sire de Saintré' (§1); the lady and love seem here to be more important than the man.[35] The heading to section 2, first after the prologue, perpetuates this: 'l'ystoire de maditte dame des Belles Cousines et de Saintré' (§2), although the modern title is usually *Jehan de Saintré* or *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* (which puts the man first from the outset). In the valediction, however, the author calls it 'cest livre, dit «Saintré»' (§178), effectively renaming the story once the lady has been written out of it. Thus the title of the work is manipulated to emphasize its changing focus.

Jehan de Saintré explicitly participates in both biography and fabliau; their different naming-patterns suggest internal confirmation of what critics perceive as the work's generic slippage. Naming and namelessness in the *roman* emphasize the way La Sale mixes genres in order to explore the world of the chivalric hero. Madame appears in two conflicting ways; La Sale uses her to contest types that are

familiar from generic categories. The namelessness of the central female character throws women's roles into question. This woman is responsible for the hero's education and for everything in his career, but she is finally no more than a cipher (like the sign embroidered on his clothes) because her value evaporates the moment he achieves his autonomy. She (a named heroine would not, as I have suggested, be able to make the effort)[36] tries to escape from the Court into a place of her own. But her story quickly becomes fabliau, in which characters are conventionally unnamed: another place where women are typecast. She has freedom only to behave lewdly and shamefully, as all women apparently do.

La Sale, like romance-writers, uses naming and namelessness actively to shape his narrative. *Saintré* contains many of the themes of romance: love, chivalry, courtly preoccupations, the 'enfances' of a hero, and a powerful awareness of name. This last is specially demonstrated by skilful exploitation of anonymity (from the lady right down to the "so-and-so"); also by use of intertextual reference (to Lancelot and others), and even by clever play with the (saint's) name Jacques. Techniques such as these are commonly found in romances. And yet La Sale uses, for example, the name of Lancelot not so as to make his work like a romance but so as to exploit a romance naming-convention for the purpose of his story. In *Saintré* the love-theme is aborted, and there is barely a hint of the marvellous:[37] Madame's namelessness and her tutelary function would suggest the fairy mistress if La Sale did not explicitly stifle any such expectation from the outset. La Sale uses the conventions of romance, and in particular a preoccupation with naming, to make a point about one of his characters. His frequent evocations of romance effectively distance his work from romance: he uses romance's own convention, of manipulating name and namelessness, to explore a world (or worlds) in which there can be no happy ending for the lady.

Notes

[1] This article is revised and expanded from a chapter of my PhD thesis, now a book: *Naming and Namelessness in Medieval Romance*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2008. An early version was presented to the International Courtly Literature Society, Bristol, in April 2002. I should like to thank colleagues who encouraged my work on it, especially Helen Cooper, Eliza Hoyer-Millar, and Jane Taylor, who read and commented on several drafts.

[2] 'The loves of a Lady of Belles Cousines and of the valiant knight Saintré.' References are to sections (and pages) in Antoine de La Sale, *Jehan de Saintré*, ed. Joël Blanchard, trans. Michel Quereuil, Paris, Livre de Poche, 1995. Translations for this essay are mine.

[3] The editor remarks on the clumsiness of transitions in the text ('l'auteur ne ménage guère les transitions', p. 8). To paraphrase Jauss' theory of genre: La Sale *dis*orients the reader's understanding, and *dis*ables a qualifying reception; see Hans Robert Jauss, 'Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature', trans. Timothy Bahti, in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. David Duff, Harlow, Longman, 2000, pp. 127–47 (131). For a reader's horizon of expectation, see

Madeleine Jeay, 'Les Eléments didactiques et descriptifs de *Jehan de Saintré*: des lourdeurs à reconsidérer', *Fifteenth Century Studies* 19 (1992), 85-100 (86).

[4] See for example Allison J. Kelly, 'Jehan de Saintré and the Dame des Belles Cousines: Problems of a Medieval Title', *French Forum* 14 (1989), 447-57 (447); Jane H. M. Taylor, 'The Pattern of Perfection: *Jehan de Saintré* and the Chivalric Ideal', *Medium Ævum* 53 (1984), 254-62 (254); Elisabeth Caron, 'Le *Petit Jehan de Saintré* dans la tradition des fabliaux', *Fifteenth Century Studies* 15 (1989), 67-80.

[5] Jeay, 'Les Eléments didactiques', p. 85.

[6] See Virginia Crosby, 'Ironic Ambiguity in La Sale's *Petit Jehan de Saintré*', *Fifteenth Century Studies* 1 (1978), 71-82 (81); Danielle Quéruel, 'Veuvage, amour et liberté: la Dame des Belles Cousines dans le roman de *Jehan de Saintré*', *Revue des Langues Romanes* 105:2 (2001), 129-42: 'l'œuvre ... semble échapper à tout classement définitif', p. 129.

[7] The author 'seeks to destroy linearity ... a mosaic of discourse', Madeleine Jeay, 'Une théorie du roman: Le manuscrit autographe de *Jehan de Saintré*', *Romance Philology* 57 (1994), 287-307 (299 and 297) (although I note that many medieval texts are neither linear nor unmixed). For a discussion of signifiers in this text (notably in Madame's lessons to the young boy), and its status as proto-novel, see Julia Kristeva, 'From Symbol to Sign', trans. Seán Hand, in Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp. 62-73.

[8] "A novel of apprenticeship", hence its lack of homogeneity: *Saintré*, trans. Roger Dubuis, Paris, Champion, 1995, Introduction, p. 16; Ruth Morse, 'Historical Fiction in Fifteenth-Century Burgundy', *Modern Language Review* 75 (1980), 48-64 (61-2).

[9] Dubuis, pp. 24-5, claims that she is arrogant and profoundly selfish.

[10] Taylor, 'Pattern', p. 254. In another article, she argues that the work is not about the decline of chivalry: the lady must be excluded because she interferes with what is serious 'play' ('The Parrot, the Knight and the Decline of Chivalry', in Keith Busby & Norris J. Lacy, eds., *Conjunctures: Medieval Studies in Honor of Douglas Kelly*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1994, pp. 529-44).

[11] Critics account for this apparent disapproval in a variety of ways: Marie-Françoise Notz, 'La Courtoisie et l'imaginaire social au XV siècle: *Jehan de Saintré*, roman d'éducation?' *Les Cahiers du CRISIMA* 1 (1993), 347-58, suggests that the author is not as misogynistic as he perhaps appears to be (p.357); Morse (p. 62) argues that the apparent misogyny is not gratuitous but necessary to the plot; Quéruel (p. 139) sees La Sale's antifeminism as nuanced by his demonstration of the young widow's difficulties.

[12] The lady is the central example of this, but she is balanced by the fact that the hero is also an imperfect stereotype: for example, he resorts to trickery and brutality in order to get the better of the abbot.

[13] See inter al. Alain Guerreau, 'Renaud de Bâgé: *Le Bel Inconnu*', *Romania* 103 (1982), 28-82 (on proper names, esp. p. 77); Sarah Kay, 'Who was Chrétien de Troyes?' *Arthurian Literature* 15 (1997), 1-35 (on anonymity, esp. p. 32); Erin F. Labbie, 'The Specular Image of the Gender-Neutral Name: Naming Silence in *Le Roman de Silence*', *Arthuriana* 7 (1997), 63-77 (on the significance of names, esp. p. 63); Norris J. Lacy, 'Naming and the Construction of Identity in *Li Chevaliers as deus espees*', *Romance Philology* 56 (2003), 203-16 (on name and identity, esp. p. 204); Phillipe Ménard, *Le Rire et le Sourire dans le Roman Courtois en France au Moyen Âge (1150-1250)*, Geneva, Droz, 1969 (on identity-games, esp. ch. IV). See also Bliss, *Naming*.

[14] See Jane H. M. Taylor, 'Courtly Patronage Subverted: *Lancelot en prose*, *Petit Jehan de Saintré*', *Medioevo Romanzo* 19 (1994), 277-92, for parallels with Lancelot; Dubuis (p. 41 n. 12) and Elisabeth Gaucher, 'Le chevalier, la femme et l'abbé: la structure de *Saintré*', *Revue des Langues Romanes* 105.2 (2001), 51-70 (63), for parallels with Yvain. For Tristan, see

Monique Santucci, 'Les gestes dans *Jehan de Saintré*', *Revue des Langues Romanes* 105.2 (2001), 99-128 (119).

[15] For a recent overview of this, and of romance-recognition in general, see Helen Cooper, *English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare*, Oxford University Press, 2004, esp. pp.7-15. The model is flexible, allowing for readers' personal perceptions and for overlapping genres or 'borderline' texts.

[16] Geffrei Gaimar, *L'Estoire des Engleis*, ed. Alexander Bell, Oxford, ANTS, XIV-XVI, 1960, vv.39-816. Dated around 1150, it features an incognito hero who does not even know who he is, and a heroine whose name virtually disappears *after* marriage – an interesting reversal of a pattern found in, for example, *Erec et Enide*.

[17] *Merlin: Roman du XIII Siècle*, ed. Alexandre Micha, Geneva, Droz, 1979, chapters 16-17. Moreover names (especially those of Arthur, Blaise, and Merlin) are given special marking in this text.

[18] Language-play, including name-play, often features in fabliaux – see especially 'Le Roi d'Angleterre et le Jongleur d'Ely', in *Recueil Général et complet des Fabliaux des XIII et XIV siècles*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon & Gaston Raynaud, 6 vols., Paris, Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1877, vol. II, pp. 242-56 ; Anne Cobby, 'Jeux d'onomastique dans *Estormi, Le Sacristain* et leurs analogues', *Reinardus* 17 (2004), 39-59.

[19] Critics writing in French are able to use the word *roman* (if only for convenience) with its wider meaning; in English one is even more reluctant to call it a novel than to call it a romance. Sophie Marnette, in the discussion following her paper 'The I-Narrator: Author, Witness and Story Participant in 14th and 15th century Chronicles', presented in November 2004 to the Oxford Medieval French Seminar, preferred "romance" for *Saintré* because it contains a high proportion of direct speech, compared with the more distancing indirect speech of contemporary chronicles. Her paper was published as 'Je dis que - Je pense que - Le je narrateur, auteur, témoin et personnage des chroniques', *LYNX* 32 (2002), 271-84.

[20] See Joseph Bédier, *Les Fabliaux*, 6th edition, 1893; repr. Paris, Champion, 1964, p. 25. Hines points out that 'en vers' obscures the fact that such stories were in the vernacular – prose narrative in the earlier Middle Ages being overwhelmingly in Latin (John Hines, *The Fabliau in English*, London, Longman, 1993, pp. 2-3). Many of the *nouvelles* roughly contemporary with *Saintré* share some features with the earlier fabliaux, notably: brevity, crudity, humour, and nameless stereotyped characters (see *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, ed. Franklin P. Sweetser, Geneva, Droz, 1966).

[21] The hero is able to retire into the legendary world that bred him (see Dubuis, pp. 18-19): the heroine is not. For the ending as Saintré's escape from the courtly/chivalric world into historical reality, see Gaucher, pp. 53 and 59, and Denis Lalande, 'Violence et courtoisie dans le roman de *Saintré*', *Revue des Langues Romanes* 105.2 (2001), 31-50 (47).

[22] For the suggestion that he is playing the honourable man, (as if) protecting a real person, see Lydie Louison & Pierre Servet, '*Saintré*, roman réaliste?' *Revue des Langues Romanes* 105.2 (2001), 71-98 (72); see Gaucher, p. 56, for the author's strategic use of anonymity.

[23] The author is characterized as a good herald but a poor man of letters, p. 14. See also Jeay, 'Théorie', for a discussion of rubrication in the ms.

[24] §3-4. It is significant that the widow of twenty-two husbands – from 'exemple' and not from legend – suggested as a comic parallel to Madame by Quéruel (p. 133), is *not* given a name.

[25] See Taylor, 'Patronage', pp. 285-6.

[26] Tutelary fairies, and fairy mistresses, are frequently found in romance literature. See Notz, especially pp. 352-3.

[27] See Clifton Cherpack, '*Le Petit Jehan de Saintré*: the archetypal background', *Journal of*

Medieval and Renaissance Studies 5.2 (1975), 343–52 (345–7).

[28] Cherpack (who notes Saintré's fault here) argues that the story, which he aligns with a Prometheus/Pygmalion myth, needs the 'creature' to escape the creator; moreover, the creator must be punished, and so the story must provide a reason for punishment. Dubuis also mentions the Pygmalion story, but is tougher on Madame than Cherpack is, pp.22-3.

[29] Jane H. M. Taylor, 'Image as Reception: Antoine de la Sale's *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré*', in *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture*, ed. Donald Maddox & Sara Sturm-Maddox, Cambridge, Brewer, 1994, pp. 265–79, points out that his brutality has been prepared earlier in the action, pp. 275–7; see also Lalande.

[30] He does not tell word for word, because he says the knight 'happened to go away' – this is not true (§175–6). The *demande d'amour* is a kind of love-riddle or courtly debate.

[31] The Abbé's wounds having healed, he has promised to visit her often, in disguise; this would be a unique (voluntary) movement in the other direction – Abbey to Court – but the story does not permit it to happen.

[32] He announces it as one of four 'beaux traittiez' (with two more 'love-stories' and a chronicle); it is unlikely that he completed the project (Dubuis, p. 287, n. 3).

[33] Dubuis, p. 13.

[34] Taylor, 'Image', p. 278. The nostalgia some critics perceive in the text is likely to be part of La Sale's construction of a new kind of knighthood; see Michelle Szkilnik, *Jehan de Saintré: Une carrière chevaleresque au XV siècle*, Geneva, Droz, 2003, who compares *Saintré* with several contemporary works in order to explore its probable reception.

[35] See Kelly, who, moreover, argues for the lady's centrality to the work: her anonymity provides interest and suspense. Blanchard (p. 11) suggests that she takes on flesh – from ideal becomes real – and that perhaps the chivalric biography (written first) was influenced or contaminated by 'nouvelles' such as those in the *Decameron*, or indeed in the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*.

[36] Fictional characters often behave as though aware of whether they are named or not: they refer to their own namelessness, fame, and so on. Madame, perhaps believing her name to be well hidden (as in the matter of Jehan wearing her colours), thinks she can act with impunity.

[37] Szkilnik suggests that splendour in the text is designed to evoke an Arthurian otherworld (p. 137); the only giant appears in a metaphor of Madame's (p. 142).