

LOVE CONVENTIONS IN MARIE'S *EQUITAN*

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ALTHOUGH IT IS CLEAR that Marie's *Lais* reflect a variety of attitudes toward love, and that she was concerned with love of various kinds, some of which are not easy to define precisely, her description of love in *Equitan* is specific enough to enable us to draw certain conclusions from it. In 1933 Hoepffner published a study of the poem in which he concluded: "Nous pensons qu'en le faisant Marie a entendu prononcer une condamnation sévère de cet amour qui n'est motivé par rien que par le simple désir sensuel. . . . Tel est donc l'amour qui entraîne les amants au péché et au crime."¹ Elsewhere, in the preliminary discussion, the conception of love which Marie condemns is associated with that developed by the troubadours.² But in 1944 Ewert objected that Marie's "didactic and moralizing intention was perhaps hardly as conscious and clear-cut as Hoepffner presents it." He observed, somewhat unhistorically, that Marie set forth "a conception which comes much closer to 'la passion' of Racine than to the 'amour courtois' of the Troubadours."³ Leaving the question of the troubadours to one side, I wish to show here that both the characteristics of sensual love as Marie describes it in *Equitan* and her attitude toward that love are commonplaces of twelfth-century thought, so that Hoepffner's perception of a moral attitude in this *lai* was probably correct.

It has been pointed out that the prologue to Marie's *Lais* shows a considerable awareness of more or less learned traditions.⁴ It is not unreasonable to assume, therefore, that she may have known something of clerical ideas concerning sensual love. During the latter part of the twelfth century by far the most popular learned discussion of human love was the *De spirituali amicitia* of Ailred of Rievaulx. The definition of sensual love in this treatise runs as follows:

Verum amicitiae carnalis exordium ab affectione procedit, quae instar meretricis divaricat pedes suos omni transeunti, sequens aures et oculos suos per varia forni-

1. "Le Lai d'*Equitan* de Marie de France," *A Miscellany of Studies . . . Presented to L. E. Kastner* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 301. Hoepffner calls attention to a similar unfavorable attitude toward sensual love in Chrétien and in Marcabru. These comparisons, I think, are just, although their validity has been obscured by recent generalizations concerning "courtly love."

2. *Ibid.*, p. 298. It seems to me unwise to include the varieties of love treated by the troubadours under a single type. See "*Amors de terra lonhdana*," *SP*, XLIX (1952), 567, n. 9. Hoepffner himself makes an exception of Marcabru.

3. Marie de France, *Lais* (Oxford, 1944), note on pp. 168-169. It is possible that Ewert's attitude toward Marie's intention might have been altered somewhat if he had been able to use Spitzer's article, "The Prologue to the *Lais* of Marie de France and Medieval Poetics," *MP*, XLI (1943), 96-102. See Ewert's note at the bottom of p. 163. Quotations from Marie in the present article follow Ewert's text.

4. See the article by Spitzer referred to above and my note, "Marie de France, *Lais*, Prologue, 13-16," *MLN*, LXIV (1949), 336-338.

cantes; per quorum aditus usque ad ipsam mentem pulchrorum corporum, vel rerum voluptuosarum inferuntur imagines: quibus ad libitum frui, putat esse beatum; sed sine socio frui, minus aestimat esse jucundum. Tunc motu, nutu, verbis, obsequiis, animus ab anime captivatur, et accenditur unus ab altero, et conflantur in unum: ut inuito foedere miserabili, quidquid sceleris, quidquid sacrilegii est, alter agat et patiat pro altero; nihilque hac amicitia dulcius arbitrantur, nihil judicant justius: idem velle, et idem nolle, sibi existimantes amicitiae legibus imperari.⁵

With only a few verbal changes this definition reappears in a condensation of Ailred's work which carried such authority in the twelfth century that it was attributed to St. Augustine.⁶ Peter of Blois defines the same kind of love in much the same way, revealing an obvious indebtedness to Ailred:

Sane amor ex carne proveniens sequitur aures et oculos suos per varia fornicantes, atque per eorum aditus usque ad ipsam mentem rerum concupiscibilium imaginem introducit. Sic more meretricio divaricat pedes suos omniumque spiritum immun-dorum spurcitiae se exponit, productionis vitae sibi spatium pollicetur. Contemnit terribilia Dei iudicia, et hoc solum vitae suae ascribit, quod indulget extraordinariae voluptati.

Sicque animus aspectibus impudicis, verbis et nutibus, et obsequiis illectus et attractus, in malum miserabiliter captivatur; dumque duae mentes quodam foedere foedo in una voluntate conflantur, quod odibilis est Deo et animae perniciosius operantes, se infelices omnia lege amicitiae facere arbitrantur.⁷

This love is not the fruit of serious deliberation, is not tested by judgment, and is not ruled by reason. It knows no measure but proceeds without discretion:

Haec itaque amicitia nec deliberatione suscipitur, nec iudicio probatur, nec regitur ratione; sed secundum impetum affectionis per diversa raptatur; non modum servans, non honesta procurans, non commoda incommodave prospiciens; sed ad omnia inconsiderate, indiscrete, leviter, immoderateque progrediens.⁸

The essential elements in Ailred's definition reappear in the definition of love at the beginning of the *De amore* of Andreas Capellanus.⁹ It is fairly

5. *PL*, CXCIV, 665. The word *affectio* in the first sentence should be translated "state of mind" rather than "affection," which has connotations in English not implied in the Latin.

6. See *PL*, XL, 833. Peter of Blois attributes this work to Augustine. See M.-M. Davy, *Un Traité de l'amour du XII^e siècle* (Paris, 1932), pp. 140, 142.

7. Davy, p. 130. In general, Peter of Blois depends heavily on Ailred's *De spirituali amicitia* and on his *Speculum caritatis*. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 34, n. 2.

8. These are Ailred's words, *loc. cit.* The other two treatises follow them closely, so that it is not necessary to quote them also.

9. See the *De amore*, ed. Trojel, p. 3. Ailred says that love has its origin in a state of mind; Andreas calls it "innata." In Andreas' definition, as in Ailred's, love proceeds from the stimulation of the senses. Then the lover forms an image or series of images of his beloved in his mind. Finally, the lovers are joined in a desire to fulfil the "laws of friendship" or the "precepts of love." Except for the expression "immoderata cogitatione," Andreas does not use Ailred's condemnatory language, but the pattern of his definition unmistakably resembles that of Ailred's definition.

certain, therefore, that the definition was a commonplace in clerical circles at the time Marie wrote.¹⁰

In the dramatic elaboration of the story of Equitan which may be considered as Marie's peculiar contribution to it,¹¹ reflections of ideas in these definitions of sensual love are not difficult to find. King Equitan is, in the first place, a man whose *affectio* is receptive to stimulation through the ears and eyes:

Deduit amout e drüerie:
16 Pur ceo maintint chevalerie.
Cil metent lur vie en nuncure
Que d'amur n'unt sen e mesure;
Tels est la mesure de amer
Que nul n'i deit reisun garder.

He does not guide himself by reason or measure but uses his love of pleasure and sexual satisfaction as a source of "chivalry." In this context the idea of chivalry probably has much the same ironic implication that it has in the *Lai dou lecheor*, but Marie does no more than hint at what is there expressed with cynical forthrightness.¹² The king's ears are soon stimulated when he hears of the beauty of his seneschal's wife. Without seeing her, he responds eagerly to what he has heard:

Li reis l'oï sovent loër.
Soventefez la salua,
40 De ses aveirs li enveia;
Sanz veüe la coveita,
E cum ainz pot a li parla.

Once the image of the lady's "gent cors" and "bele faiture" is firmly implanted through the ears, Equitan becomes anxious to satisfy his eyes.¹³ When he does so, he is wounded to the heart by the arrow of love. This is a figurative way of saying that the image of the lady's beauty passed from the

10. Ailred's work as a whole was designed to form a Christian counterpart to Cicero's *De amicitia*. It is not improbable that ideas quite similar to those expressed by Ailred became associated with Cicero's essay in medieval academic circles.

11. Cf. Hoepffner, p. 295. It is not necessary to confine Marie's contributions to lines 1-190. Perhaps rather she made whatever alterations were necessary to form of her original materials "une mout bele conjointure."

12. See Gaston Paris, "Lais inédits," *Romania*, VIII (1879), 65-66. For the ideal underlying the social satire in this poem, see John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* (ed. Webb), VI, 11; *Carmen de bello Lewensi* (ed. Kingsford), lines 165 ff. An element of literary satire as well as social satire in the *Lai dou lecheor* has been suggested by Mortimer J. Donovan, *Romanic Review*, XLIII (1952), 81-86. This theory is especially helpful in accounting for some of the formal elements in the poem.

13. Love as a result of mere description is a folk-tale motif (T 11.1), but authors of Marie's sophistication do not usually use materials of this kind without purpose, or simply for the sake of preserving a story. In beginning with the ears Marie was probably following Ailred's description of carnal love or some later description based on it.

eye into the mind, where it remained fixed. Having followed his ears and eyes, the king spends a sleepless night nursing his conscience and contemplating his proposed conquest.

Equitan's conscience is disturbed by one thought: the love he feels for his seneschal's wife is contrary to the love he owes his seneschal:

72 Ceo est la femme al seneschal.
Garder li dei amur e fei,
Si cum jeo voil k'il face a mei.

The king's lecherous inclinations are thus, as he realizes, contrary to his feudal obligations and to the second precept of charity.¹⁴ What he proposes to do is, in Ailred's language, plainly "wicked" and "impious." And his rationalization to excuse it is, to say the least, cynical:

Si bele dame tant mar fust,
80 S'ele n'amast u dru eüst!
Que devendreit sa curteisie,
S'ele n'amast de drüerie?

The lady is so beautiful that it would be a shame if she did not engage in an adulterous love. Moreover, she would have no "courtesy" unless she loved. The courtesy Equitan seeks in his lady is not that frequently ascribed to the Blessed Virgin and her imitators but rather that described in the "cortois bon" *Lai dou lecheor* or in the *Du C.* of Gautier le Leu.¹⁵ It is an appropriate companion to his own "chivalry." When the lady makes her first refusal on the grounds of social inequality, the king at once questions her courtesy (151-162). However, he promises that he will become her man and "ami," turning the feudal relationship between them upside down. And he will, of course, die if she refuses:

14. Feudal amity between lord and vassal had been traditionally associated with divine love. E.g., see F. L. Ganshof, *Qu'est-ce que la féodalité?* (Brussels, 1947), pp. 49-51. What was implied by "faith" is described, *ibid.*, pp. 103-104. Cf. Marc Bloch, *La Société féodale: la formation des liens de dépendance* (Paris, 1949), pp. 354-361. The discussion in John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, IV, 3, is relevant here. In Carolingian times, adultery with a vassal's wife was considered an act of treason and was probably still so regarded in the twelfth century. See Ganshof, p. 46. A king especially was supposed to forego personal satisfaction in order to maintain a bond of charity with his people. See *Carmen de bello Levensi*, ll. 909 ff.

15. The latter poem is printed by C. H. Livingston, *Le Jongleur Gautier Le Leu* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), pp. 238-249. The editor's remark, pp. 237-238, that this poem is "une expression singulière de la philosophie de la nature traitée amplement par Jean de Meung dans le *Roman de la Rose*" shows, it seems to me, an insensitivity to Gautier's ironic humor and may also be too severe on Jean de Meung. Since he took the trouble to translate Ailred's *De spirituali amicitia* Jean de Meung must have had at least some regard for its principles. On true and false courtesy, cf. Dante, *Convivio*, II, xi. The use of false courtesy as a veil for irregularities is amusingly illustrated in Chaucer's description of Symkyn the miller: "For therbiforn he stal but curteisly, / But now he was a thief outrageously." Cf. "Chaucerian Tragedy," *ELH*, XIX (1952), p. 18.

Ne me laissez pur vus murir!
 Vus seiez dame e jeo servant,
 176 Vus orguilluse e jeo preiant!

On the basis of these and similar "obsequia," which are typical of what has been called "courtly love," the two exchange rings and enter into a "miserable pact." As Ailred describes pacts of this kind, the participants consider nothing sweeter nor more just than their mutual satisfactions. When Equitan's subjects demand that he marry, therefore, he and his lady, in outright defiance of all justice, plan to murder the seneschal to get him out of the way so that they may preserve their sweet union. The extremely hot bath into which this plan leads them may be regarded as a poetically appropriate opposite of that cool bath in which impulses like those which motivate the lovers are supposed to be removed. Marie's conclusion refers not only to the murder trap but also to Equitan's love:

308 Ici purreit ensample prendre:
 Tel purcace le mal d'autrui
 Dunt le mals tut revert sur lui.

For, as Andreas says, love of this kind is not only displeasing to God; it also causes one to injure his neighbor: "Nam ex amore proximus laeditur, quem ex mandato divi no quisque tanquam se ipsum iubetur diligere."¹⁶ And when a man injures his neighbor in this way, he injures himself.

Marie's story reflects with some fidelity the conventional attributes of lecherous love as they are described in more or less learned works of her time. In view of this fact, and in view of her ironic treatment of the "chivalry" and "courtesy" which spring from this love, we may conclude that Hoepffner was justified in attributing to her a "didactic and moralizing intention." But the words *didactic* and *moralizing* have, in our time, certain unpleasant connotations so that we hesitate to apply them to admirable works of art. Perhaps it would be better to say that Marie shaped her story in such a way that it would illustrate in terms of concrete particulars familiar to her audience something she regarded as a respectable and useful philosophical idea. Ideas of this kind and their practical applications are difficult for laymen to comprehend when they are expressed abstractly, so that the unlearned are inclined to have ears and hear not. Philosophical principles are of little value if no one understands them. But Marie herself expresses this more vividly and forcefully than I can:

Quant uns granz biens est mult oïz,
 Dunc a primes est il fluriz,
 E quant loëz est de plusurs,
 Dunc ad esbandues ses flurs.

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16. Trojel, p. 316.