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BERENDT (Genevieve), « Fashioning knighthood. The Competition of Consumption in *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* »

RÉSUMÉ – S'appuyant sur les théories de la consommation et de la mode modernes, ainsi que sur les systèmes de mode médiévaux, cet article soutient que, dans *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* d'Antoine de La Sale, le succès de Jehan à la cour est directement lié à sa capacité à se présenter de manière adéquate au sein du système de mode de la cour. En élargissant les considérations sur le processus de préparation pour devenir chevalier, la mode masculine se révèle être une barrière à l'entrée dans la société courtoise.

MOTS-CLÉS – mode et consommation, vêtements, chevalerie, quinzième siècle, littérature de conduite, littérature médiévale

BERENDT (Genevieve), « Mode et chevalerie. Compétition et consommation dans *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* »

ABSTRACT – Drawing on theories of consumption and modern fashion, as well as medieval fashion systems, this article argues that, in *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* by Antoine de La Sale, Jehan's success at court is directly linked to his ability to properly present himself within the court's fashion system. By expanding the considerations of the process involved in the preparation for becoming a chevalier, men's fashion is revealed to be a barrier to entry into courtly society.

KEYWORDS – fashion and consumption, clothing, knighthood, fifteenth century, conduct literature, medieval literature

FASHIONING KNIGHTHOOD

The Competition of Consumption in *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré*

Le Petit Jehan de Saintré is a romanesque book of conduct written in the form of a bibliography of a real fifteenth-century knight named Jehan de Saintré and was authored by Antoine de La Sale in 1456 for Jean II d'Anjou, the duke of Lorraine.¹ This didactic treatise follows the story of a young man whose goal is to become a *chevalier*. Throughout the work, Jehan is guided by his lady, known only as *Belles Cousines*², in everything from nail care to the acquisition of horses, proper prayers and gift giving. As young Jehan heeds her doctrines, he also receives purses full of money (écus) along with detailed lists of specific sartorial items to buy. It is this guidance on his purchases which is the focus of this analysis. Fashion and other forms of consumption are not typically considered in courtly literature in terms of competition, but rather as a means of marking or considering gender and power structures. As Monica L. Wright notes, 'Descriptions of clothing in literature appear precisely to tell us something beyond what the rest of the character presentation does.'³ What one purchases allows other characters and the reader to discern all manner of characteristics such as marital or economic status, political or religious affiliations to name a few. Furthermore, the scholarship on fashion and its representation has centered primarily on women's clothes. That is not to say that men's styles have not been treated, rather that most research has

1 There has been much scholarship as to the genre of *Jehan de Saintré*. Jane Bliss, Jane H. M. Taylor, Elizabeth Caron and Patricia Cholakian have all been prominent voices in this debate.

2 The love and guide of Jehan de Saintré is never named, and very little information is given about her. In both the original text and its' translations, she is referred to as 'Madame' I have chosen to continue this tradition.

3 Monica L Wright, 'Chapter Nine; Literary Representations', in *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion: In the Medieval Age* ed. by Sarah-Grace Heller (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), pp. 248–268 (p. 249).

focused specifically on armor and knightly accoutrements. For characters like Jehan de Saintr , I argue that the being unfashionable becomes the barrier to entry into courtly society. Before he can become a member of the court, he must demonstrate a proper amount of consumption and only after this may he take part in contests. The central part of the narrative relates the competitions in which Jehan can prove his honor and strength. Yet, when the word ‘competition’ is applied to *chevaliers* specific images of simulated combats come to mind, such as hunting, archery, and jousting and not their choice of shoes or embellishments.

However, before Jehan even leaves for a tournament, an important battle has already taken place. Consumption, or more specifically what Jehan buys at the discretion of his lady, is represented as a contest in this work. John Flugel, the nineteenth-century psychoanalyst who wrote *The Psychology of Clothes* notes, “There can be little doubt that the ultimate and essential cause of fashion lies in competition; competition of a social and a sexual kind, in which the social elements are more obvious and manifest, and the sexual elements are more inart and concealed.”⁴ While Flugel may have been writing of modern systems of fashion, it is clear that his analysis applies to this representation of a fifteenth-century court where Jehan procures his clothing in order to compete with other pages for the king’s attention. While the narrative is fiction, the motivations that drive characters to acquire certain objects and the reasons for their differentiation or similarity are real and worth considering. Before our protagonist can even take up arms in a joust or m l e he must first be elevated to a certain status at court. Only when Jehan is properly dressed, following the advice of Madame, is he able to gain favor and leave to prove himself as a *chevalier*. Fashion is thus a crucial aspect of the competition in this work that has been overlooked in comparison to the knightly characteristics. Through the examination of four different shopping lists given to Jehan by Madame, it becomes apparent that he competes against the other pages for attention as well as financial benefactors through the act of consumption which results in his success at tournaments and later crusades.

When Madame first decides she wants to turn a young page into the worthiest knight she chooses Jehan. Although he was hesitant to swear his love to her at first, he quickly agreed to serve her and keep

4 J. C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 138.

their love a secret.⁵ In exchange she would not only advise him on all matters of his daily life, but she would also financially support him. After teaching him the basic tenants of being a worthy man and lover she charges him with his first task. It is at this moment that Jehan enters the competition of fashion. Madame gives him a tiny purse containing twelve écus and complex instructions that he should procure these items and tell no one of their relationship.

‘Mon ami, je vous donne ceste bourslette telle qu’elle est, et .xij. escus qui sont dedens, sy veuil que vous portez. Et des .xij. escus, vous les emploierez en ung pourpoint de damas ou de saptin cramoisy, et deux paires de fines chausses, les unes de fine escarlatte et les aultres de fine brunette de Saint Lo, qui seront toutes brodees du long et par dehors des coulleurs et devise que la bourse est. Et sy en aurez .iiij. paires de draps linges et .iiij. queuvrechiez bien deliez, des sollers et des pattins qui soient bien fais: et que je vous voye bien joly dimence prochain.’⁶

Here, Madame gives Jehan a list of the clothes that he will need to be properly dressed. Not only does she advise him on which items to buy, she notes quantity and even style. Jean Baudrillard theorized in his work *La société de consommation*, that when people consume, they partake in La Plus Petite Différence Marginale or P.P.D.M. According to his theory, people will conform to an ideal or a common style to show they are within the bounds and tastes of society, however, at the same time, to distinguish themselves, they will choose small aspects of personalization. This is represented with the explicit instructions on stylistic choices

5 Marie de France also uses a similar relationship between a mysterious lady and a knight in *Lanval*. The lady promises that Lanval will want for nothing if he keeps their relationship a secret. As with Jehan, Lanval finds himself in a bind when members of the court attempt to learn the identity of his love.

6 Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan De Saintré*, ed. by Blanchard, trans. by Quéreuil (Paris: Livre de poche, 1995), pp. 110–112. All English translations are taken from Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan de Saintré: A Late Medieval Education in Love and Chivalry* trans. by Krueger, and Taylor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). For this quote, p. 35: ‘My friend, I’m giving you this little purse, with twelve écus inside. From now on, I want the colors and the letters entwined on it to be the device that you wear for my sake. As for the twelve écus, I want you to purchase a crimson doublet in damask or silk, and two pairs of fine hose— one of fine scarlet cloth and the other of brunet from Saint-Lô, all embroidered with the same colors and device as the purse. You should also purchase four pairs of linen underwear and four fine kerchiefs, as well as well-made shoes and pattens; I want to see you very handsomely fitted out by next Sunday. If you’re able to manage this very efficiently and graciously, then God willing, I shall do even more for you.’

presented to Jehan. It is not enough for Jehan to obtain just any pair of hose. He must purchase two pairs, one a bright scarlet and the other specifically from Saint Lô, a city known for its weaving. Furthermore, his garments must be embroidered with the device and colors that are on the purse. The insistence of Jehan to wear Madame's insignia speaks to the paradoxical nature of fashion as argued by Sarah-Grace Heller. The crucial element of the relationship between Jehan and Madame is secrecy; no one can know that he has sworn himself to her. However, at the same time he is to publicly display that he has promised his loyalty to a woman. Thus, 'understanding the necessary paradoxical equilibrium between conformity and choice is key: privileging one of these forces is what leads to controversy.'⁷ If the markings are too identifiable, everyone at court will know of their relationship, but hiding any identifying mark of his pledge could lead others to believe he is unattached.

While Jehan will purchase clothing conforming to the standard dress of a page, he will modify his outfit through specific colors and embroidery to differentiate himself. By following the precise choices of his lady, Jehan not only demonstrates his adherence to the preferences of the court, but he will also stand out amongst the other pages. Here, the competitive aspect of fashion becomes clear. If every other page is depicted as wearing a similar style of doublet and hose, it becomes crucial to customize one's attire. Furthermore, by placing the devices of a lady upon his clothes he publicly asserts that he has sworn his love to a woman who in turn has deemed him worthy of both love and financial backing.

After his first purchase, Jehan's thoughts are focused on fashion. When Jacques Martel, a squire, saw the delivery of all the goods Jehan had ordered, he questioned the young boy about the source of his newfound wealth. Jehan quickly lies that his mother has given him money, "car elle me a envoyé de l'argent pour moy esbanoier et pour mes neccessitez, et me semble que d'argent n'ay je mie gramment que faire, fors pour moy honnestement habillier."⁸ Jacques is pleased with his response noting that the other pages do not use their money in honorable ways. Whereas Jehan's peers have used their money for gambling and drinking, Jehan uses his money only for fashion. His unique desire is to be well dressed.

7 Sarah-Grace Heller, *Fashion in Medieval France* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), p. 21.
 8 Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan De Saintré*, ed. Blanchard, p. 118. *Jehan de Saintré*, trans. Krueger / Taylor, p. 37: 'for she has sent me money to enjoy myself and to pay for my necessities. And it seems that I have no great need for money, other than to dress myself like a gentleman.'

Jacques is not the only member of the court to notice this change in the young man. A favorite among the ladies at court for his shyness and lack of a paramour, they are quick to notice the change in Jehan's clothing, particularly due to its suggestion of a relationship. However, their focus lies on the sexual connotations of his new wardrobe. As noted earlier, Flugel argues that there is a sexual element of the competition which is not as outward or as recognizable as the social aspects. Yet, at this point in the narrative, the sexual nature of his clothing is on full display and even encourages a sexually charged encounter between Jehan and the ladies of the court. At the will of his lady, he had her insignia embroidered upon his clothing which constitutes a very visual marker of the control she has over his body, both physically and financially. Yet the design is unknown to anyone at the court due to the secret nature of their relationship. As Heller notes concerning fashion systems within fashion systems, "display of fashionable appearance is thought to have a power to seduce: to attract the interest of others or awaken desire in potential sexual partners."⁹ Madame playfully suggests that she and the other women question Jehan about the designs embroidered upon his clothing to learn the name of his lover. "Alors l'une prent le bras, l'autre prent l'espaule et les autres parmi le corps tant que sur piez le soutinrent et sourdirent. Lors Madame et toutes les autres, et plusieurs qui n'y furent pas appellees, ces devises veirent, don't il en fust de tous et de toutes tresolé."¹⁰ In a sexually suggestive action, the women of the court grab Jehan and place their hands all over his body. The ladies are all determined to learn about the owner of the design since the knowledge of a young man and woman in a secret relationship is too attractive of an idea to be left alone. Furthermore, Jehan's refusal to reveal her identity brings immense pleasure to Madame as she watches the ladies all fawn over her love, "Mais du grant plaisir que Madame en prist, son cœur et son corps en furent tous rassaziés."¹¹ We see her

9 Heller, *Fashion in Medieval France*, p. 49.

10 Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan De Saintré*, ed. Blanchard, p. 122. *Jehan de Saintré*, trans. Krueger / Taylor, p. 38: 'So one of the ladies grabbed his arm, while another took him by the shoulder, and the others held onto his body, until they made him stand up on his feet. Then Madame and all her ladies, and several who had no particular business there, were able to see the devices, for which he was much praised.'

11 *Ibid.* For the translation, Krueger / Taylor, p. 39: 'For the more she observed him, the more he pleased her—since there was no man or woman at court who did not think him a worthy gentleman.'

enjoy from the paradoxical nature of the fashion. While she enjoys the secret nature of their love, she risks it being known to the court while it is embroidered upon Jehans' clothing.

This moment demonstrates the sexual aspect of clothing. Catherine Bronnimann, author of *La robe de Psyché: Essai de lien entre psychanalyse et vêtement*, argues that seduction is intrinsically calculated within fashion where 'seduction is created from calculation and effort, it is the desire to be lured or to lure.'¹² The clothing that Jehan had purchased was indeed compelled by a calculated effort on his lady's part. By having the design of a mysterious benefactor upon his clothing the ladies at court are lured by the delight of uncovering a secret. They are also attracted to Jehan believing that he must be an ideal lover if a woman has given him such gifts. His ability to keep their love secret and as well seeing other women be lured by him only drives Madame to give him more funds. Madame lures Jehan with her promises of love, money, and counsel. He is drawn in by the idea of not only a lady love but the possibility of upward social mobility. This attraction towards his lady increases as he continuously profits from her teachings and their accompanying purses.

Jehan is noticed by two key characters on the subsequent Sunday before mass. First is the queen, who remarks that he is well dressed and pleasing to look at. Then the king notes that if the young boy was only three or four years older, he should like him for his *varlet-tranchant*. This episode demonstrates how Jehan has succeeded in this stage of the competition. His task was to procure a set list of clothes and not divulge his relationship with the young widow to anyone. The objective of the first list was to make Jehan known to powerful members at court and the two most important each noted his attractive appearance. Here both the reader and Jehan confirm that should he follow his lady's counsel he will continue to profit from her teachings. Madame, delighted upon hearing the comments of the nobility, begins to prepare Jehan for the next stage of the competition. He must further distinguish himself from the other pages to receive a higher rank at court. She gives Jehan a second list, itemizing clothing with even more decoration as well as non-portable items.

12 Catherine Bronnimann, *La Robe de Psyché: Essai de lien entre psychanalyse et vêtement* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2015), p. 41. The translation is my own as there is no current modern English translation.

‘Or ça, mon ami, je vueil que vous ayez .ij. aultres robes, dont l’une sera de fine brunette de Saint Lo, et ceste sera fourree de martres, et l’aulture sera d’un fin gris de Monstieviller, qui sera doublé d’un fin blanchet, a tous les jours, fors quant chevaucherez après Monseigneur le roy. Et sy avrez deux chapperons, l’un d’escarlatte, et l’autre noire, et sy avrez encores ung pourpoint de saptin bleu, et deux aultres paires de fines chausses, queurechiefsz, chemises, sollers, pattins, aguillettes, laissez et aultres choses necessaires. Et pour ce faire et vous entretenir, je vous donrray soixante escus et verray comment vou vous gouvernerez.’¹³

She now increases his funds from twelve to sixty écus. While it may appear strange that Jehan is given a list so soon after his first purchase, consumption theory may offer an explanation. Thorstein Veblen, the economist and sociologist, has at length discussed the theories of conspicuous consumption in which people buy goods both to be recognized by their peers and to achieve a higher social status. The widow understands that recognition and promotion are the only way Jehan can attempt to become a *chevalier* at this court. Veblen further asserts that this expenditure is a constant endeavor: “The tendency in any case is constantly to make the present pecuniary standard the point of departure for a fresh increase of wealth.”¹⁴ Jehan had recently purchased fine clothing and won the favor of both the king and queen, but he would need to continuously consume and differentiate himself to advance at the court. While he is being noticed by the nobility, other pages or members of the court are also consuming goods and vying for attention. Thus, the goods that he purchases are now of a higher quality and price. For this phase of the competition, he is to buy two robes: one lined with sable, and the other a high-quality grey wool. Along with these luxurious items, he is to purchase more hose, shoes, and other accessories. These are designed

13 Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan De Saintré*, ed. Blanchard, p. 126. *Jehan de Saintré*, trans. Krueger / Taylor, p. 41. “So now, my friend, I would like you to have two other gowns, one of which shall be made of fine Saint-Lô brunet, trimmed with sable, and the other will be a fine gray from Montivilliers, lined with fine lambswool; you should wear these every day except when you ride along with Monseigneur the King. I would also like you to have two hoods, one scarlet and the other black, as well as a blue satin doublet and two other fine pairs of hose, and kerchiefs, shifts, shoes, pattens, and other necessary things. And I want you to play tennis from time to time, too, and archery—both are very respectable games that will keep you in good shape. To buy all this and to keep yourself well maintained, I’m giving you sixty écus; I’ll be observing how you conduct yourself.”

14 Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1899), p. 31.

to show that he has the wealth to acquire multiples of several items. However, the items that he is to obtain are of such a quality and design that he will now require a servant.

‘Et, car vous n’avez encores nul vostre varlet, pour ce vueil que a Gillet de Corps, qui est bon et loyal serviteur de l’escuier, vous donnez tous les mois . viij. solz de pencion, et qu’il prende bien garde a vos robes, chausses et habillemens, et verray comment vous gouvernerez, comme dit est.’¹⁵

As Madame stresses, he will be riding with the king and playing sports. Jehan will not have time, nor will it be appropriate, for him to be focused on the maintenance and upkeep of his horse and expanding wardrobe. A servant will care for his possessions as well as demonstrate his rising status.

There is also a marked change in the types of clothing that Jehan is to purchase. While the first list consisted of items that were daily necessities, the second list requires outfits to be worn at specific times. Heller notes that outfits for certain occasions are an important hallmark of a fashion system: ‘This is significant because it implies the possession of multiple changes of clothing. Moreover, it suggests the invention of reasons to change clothes for multiple public appearances, creating more opportunities to demonstrate personal choices.’¹⁶ Jehan must purchase another set of clothing that he can wear daily but it will not be worn when he is riding with the King. This passage reveals the cultural expectation that certain events such as an outing with the king not only require a change of clothing, but that the outfit one wears for such an event would be specially chosen. Although Madame does not instruct him to purchase one, it can be assumed that he would need an outfit for horseback if his others were not to be worn. Furthermore, with the insistence that he now have a servant, procuring and maintaining different ensembles becomes a job for someone else so that Jehan can focus on the competition.

The second list also references another form of consumption besides clothing that is central to both fashion as well as the competition

15 Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan De Saintré*, ed. Blanchard, p. 126. *Jehan de Saintré*, trans. Krueger / Taylor, p. 41. ‘Since you don’t yet have your own servant, I want you to retain Gillet de Corps, who’s a solid, dependable squire’s servant, at a wage of eight sous for him to take good care of your clothing, hose, and armor.’

16 Heller, *Fashion in Medieval France*, p. 75.

represented at the court. Given that this is to some extent a conduct book, it's worth noting that correct etiquette is also a type of consumable. Although one cannot physically purchase good manners, as one might purchase shoes, Veblen notes that one has consumed time to master them: 'The knowledge and habit of good form come only by long-continued use. Refined tastes, manners, habits of life are a useful evidence of gentility, because good breeding requires time, application, and expense, and can therefore not be compassed by those whose time and energy are taken up with work.'¹⁷ By behaving well at court, Jehan shows those around him that he has taken the time to understand the rules of conduct expected of him. Manners or courtly conduct demonstrate wealth since only people of a certain class have the leisure time to spend perfecting important aspects of etiquette. These actions are so noticeable that there 'are few things that so touch us with instinctive revulsion as a break of decorum.'¹⁸ If Jehan fails to behave properly, especially at a public event, his actions are a negative reflection upon himself as well as those who associate with the young Jehan. This consumption of time for manners extends to other activities like archery and falconry. They mark that a person is of social standing to have both the freedom and the financial means to practice and perfect these activities. In terms of consumption, not only is Jehan spending money on clothes and paying a servant, but he is also now spending time bettering himself in more noble activities.

Jehan is so well received by others that three years later, at the age of sixteen, Madame decides that is time for him to be elevated from the rank of page to something more befitting. Remembering that the King had wished for the young page to serve him at his table, she asks the queen to intercede on Jehan's behalf. The queen is described as accepting quite willingly the proposal to promote young Jehan. She notes that many at court had found him to be gracious and courtly. The King quickly and happily appoints Jehan as his *varlet-tranchant* and gives him three horses and two servants as a gift and symbol of his promotion within the court.

Jehan has triumphed over the other pages and achieves a new rank in closer proximity to the king. However, he is now competing against

¹⁷ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, pp. 48–49.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

other squires at court. The next stage of the competition requires even more fashion. As a reward Madame gives him another purse containing a total of 160 écus. To mark this new stage in Jehan's life, rather than clothing Jehan is instructed to buy horses and livery,

[. . .] tenez cy en ceste bourse cent et soixante escuz que je vous donne pour acheter ung gent et frisque cheval de compaignon, qui soit bien saillant et joyeux, quoy qu'il vous couste, jusques a .iiijxx. escus, et ung aultre de bonne taille, pour vostre chevauchier a tous les jours, jusques a .xx. escus, et ung aultre de bonne taille, pour vostre chevauchier a tous les jours, jusques a .xx. escus, et ung aultre cheval double, pour porter vostre malle et ung varlet, de .xxx. escus; et sont cent .xxx. escus. Des .xxx. escus qui restent, vous en ferez faire de beaux hernoiz de draps, et vestirez vous et voz gens serviteurs de vostre livree semblable, quant chevaucherez.¹⁹

Rather than more clothing, he is to purchase three horses of varying usage as well as a caparison with matching livery. Jehan must have the proper attire to show his rank and wealth if he is to be seen riding with the King. Furthermore, he will need to be able to clearly show that he is able to afford servants as well as dress them in his devices. When in public, Jehan represents the court to which he belongs. Should he be seen as poorly or improperly dressed while riding, others could question as to whether the King is able to properly outfit his own men, this eliciting shame. This potential for humiliation applies to Jehan in his own position of employer to his servants as their appearance will affect how he is perceived at court, whether positively or negatively.

Jehan has so far been depicted as successful in the competition when it comes to the proper procurement of items for himself. He has purchased several outfits, accessories, horses, and servants. However, consumption and fashion are not just about one's purchases for oneself. The fourth and final shopping list constitutes the culmination of the teachings of the three previous lists. This list, accompanied by 300 écus, is comprised

19 Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan De Saintré*, ed. Blanchard, p. 144. *Jehan de Saintré*, trans. Krueger / Taylor, p. 48: 'And take this little purse containing one hundred sixty écus. I want you to buy a fine, spirited, lively horse to ride with the King, a horse that will be sprightly and strong; spend whatever it costs up to eighty écus, and then buy another sturdy horse to ride every day, for up to twenty écus, and for thirty écus find another strong two year-old horse to carry your trunk, and find a servant: this makes a total of one hundred thirty. With the remaining thirty écus, you should have beautiful caparisons made, and your servants should be attired in matching liveries when you ride together. Do as you like with the rest of the money, as long as it lasts.'

solely of gifts that Jehan is to offer to members of the court. If done correctly, according to Madam's desire, Jehan will demonstrate that he is aware of which items are not only fashionable, but which are of good quality. Additionally, he will also exhibit respect for the different social statuses within the court through the specific choices in gifts:

[...] a l'un le cheval ou haquenee, et a l'autre la robe, et aux officiers les robes, de livree, affin que tous soient pour vous; a Madame la rayone, aucune fois la belle haguenee, aultre fois le beau cheval pour sa littiere ou pour son chariot; aux aultres dames, selon ce qu'elles sont: aux unes, les beaux atours, aux aultres, les saintures d'argent bien dorees, aux unes, fins tissus seulement, et aux aultres, les belles ferrures, aux unes, les gracieux dyamans et rubis, et aux aultres, les verges d'or gentement esmaillees; et es basses damoiselles, boursses, gandz, lassez et espingles, selon ce qu'elles sont. Et par ainsy, au regard de vostre largesse, honneur, grace et amour de chascun seront avec vous.²⁰

Madame is specific not only in the choice of gifts, but also about the recipient of each gift. Although she mentions the gift of gowns for men at court, she offers much more precise descriptions with regards to the gifts for women. The queen receives the most expensive gifts: a horse for personal riding and another that she can attach to her chariot. Other gifts of cloth can be offered to women of a certain social status. The items of clothing would have been given to women of a higher station because, as Wright observes, 'Gifts of clothing are particularly important for medieval society because they solidified personal bonds and relationships.'²¹ Medieval French literature is filled with references of good kings and lords who had bestowed gifts of clothing and arms to those whom they esteemed and wished to honor. Other than clothing,

20 Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan De Saintré*, ed. Blanchard (Paris: Livre de poche, 1995), p. 148–150. *Jehan de Saintré*, trans. Krueger / Taylor, p. 50: 'You should offer gowns matching their livery to court officials, so that they'll be beholden to you. For Madame the Queen, you should offer on one occasion a fine hackney for riding and another time a fine horse for her litter or her carriage. Give the other ladies gifts according to their position: offer some ladies beautiful headdresses and others nicely gilded silver belts. Present some ladies only with a fine length of cloth and others with beautiful clasps; offer some ladies lovely diamonds and rubies, and let others have delicately enameled gold rings. To the lesser ladies, give purses, gloves, laces, and pins, all according to their station. And in this way, out of regard for your largesse, the honor, grace, and love of all will be yours.'

21 Monica L. Wright, 'Chapter Nine; Literary Representations', in *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion: In the Medieval Age* ed. by Sarah-Grace Heller (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), pp. 248–268 (p. 249). John Carl Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 257.

Madame suggests that Jehan can give gifts of small but well-crafted trinkets such as belts or rings. These could have a charged meaning. Belts were notable gifts for conveying love due in part to the way they hugged the body sitting at the waist. Purses and pouches were referenced by several medieval writers both in seriousness and jest for their resemblance to genitals.²² For lesser ladies of the court, smaller and less expensive items would suffice. Pins, for example, may have been less explicitly sexual but their penetrative quality offers similar implications, as do laces' binding to protect from immodesty. The attention to presents specifically for women highlights the sexual nature of gifting that is a common theme throughout the narrative. After all, the money and other gifts Madame gives to Jehan are due to their sexual relationship.

This act of gift-giving is an integral moment in the competition for Jehan. It offers him a chance to gain favor with other members at court who could very well offer him financial support in the future. As Heller writes, 'Gifts of small adornments suggest the presence of fashion, first as consumable objects in themselves, and additionally as a way to win affection, to seduce, to give and gain pleasure.'²³ Not only do most of these gifts suggest seduction or pleasure to the receivers, but perhaps most importantly for Jehan, these gifts foster the possibility of a future connection with powerful or wealthy members of the court. In conjunction with the list of presents, Madame offers this as a teaching: 'Il nous fault penser que vous vous y puissiez bien entretenir, laquelle chose est en court tresforte par le faulx parler des envieux, se n'est pour acquerir amis, les plus prouchains de entour eulx: les ungs par dons et les aultres par promesses,'²⁴ With favor at the court constantly changing it is crucial to maintain and create relationships either through promises or better yet, presents.

As with his previous moments of consumption and courtly display, Jehan receives praise and admiration. Thanks to the advice of Madame, he has caught the attention of everyone at court, especially the King's:

22 Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (New York: Abrams, 1998), p. 61.

23 Heller, *Fashion in Medieval France*, p. 85.

24 Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan De Saintré*, ed. Blanchard, p. 148. *Jehan de Saintré* trans. Krueger / Taylor, p. 50: 'We must think about how you might maintain that favor, which is a very hard thing to do at court, because of the lies and slander of envious people, unless you cultivate friends among those closest to the King, attracting some by your gifts and others by promises.'

'Je seray bien trompé se Saintré n'est une fois bon homme. Mais don't lui vient ce don't il est ainssi habillié?'²⁵ The King remarks that unless he is proven wrong, he believes the Jehan will be a notable man in the future. However, he is unsure and even questions the nature of Jehan's sudden wealth. From the king's remarks we can infer that Jehan's ability to dress himself as well as give such generous gifts is so out of the ordinary that it raises questions.²⁶ Upon learning that the money has most likely come from his parents, who are described as honorable, the King wishes to offer him support and sends Jehan 500 écus. After receiving the funds from the King, the Queen herself sends 300 écus. With the highest members of the court validating Jehan, he has won the competition of fashion.

Pleased with his victory, Madame announces that since Jehan has achieved such a status at this court, he must build his reputation in other kingdoms and take up arms in tournaments and challenges. It is at this moment that readers find themselves in familiar territory where the subject of discussion is knightly exploits. However, she assures Jehan that he need not concern himself about his finances for she will make sure that the Queen and King as well as her uncles, the Lords of Anjou, Berry, and Burgundy will all generously pay for any expenses that he may incur.

The undertaking of these games was by no means an inexpensive activity. A certain level of wealth was required to furnish proper arms and armor as well as ensure that any horses and servants were properly dressed and fed. Furthermore, gifts to hosts and hostesses or members of other courts would have been expected and were thus a necessary expenditure. Before Jehan de Saintré can leave for Navarre, Aragon, Portugal, and Castille to prove himself as a *chevalier*, he must have

25 In Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan De Saintré*, ed. Blanchard, p. 160. Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan de Saintré*, trans. Krueger / Taylor, p. 54: 'Unless I am much mistaken, I predict that Saintré will one day be an excellent young man. But how does it happen that he is so well dressed?'

26 In Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan De Saintré*, ed. Blanchard, p. 162. The king in the modern French says, 'Je serai bien surpris si Saintré ne deviant un jour quelqu'un. Mais où trouve-t-il de quoi s'habiller de la sorte?' or 'I'd be very much deceived if Jehan wasn't really a good man. But where does he get his good clothes?' in my own modern English translation. This translation highlights the uneasiness the King has about Jehan's sudden wealth. The 'mais' stresses that it is not common for a young man to be so well dressed. According to the King either he is honorable and there is something about Jehan's background that he is not aware of or Jehan has tricked the court into believing him to be an honorable man.

secured this crucial financing. When he arrives at these foreign courts, he will need to display a certain level of luxury that not only shows the glory of his King's court, but to gain more wealth abroad. As Veblen attests, 'The possession of wealth, which was at the outset valued simply as an evidence of efficiency, becomes, in popular apprehension, itself a meritorious act.'²⁷ While in terms of the first list, the items such as a doublet or hose would have been essential requirements for a page, the second and third lists demonstrate that showing his new attire itself becomes an act of wealth making. Finally, his fourth spending task was designed to demonstrate his desire to cultivate relationships. As Jehan is given more funds and demonstrates how he spends his écus, he is received favorably by others and is given an even larger stipend. To gain riches in this competition and at others, one needs to display wealth.

Scholars have focused on simulated warfare such as the tournament or joust in terms of the contests within knighthood. However well before a knight and his retinue arrive, a battle of fashion takes place to even determine who is eligible to join in the games. Expanding the considerations of the process involved in the preparation for becoming a *chevalier* reveals men's fashion to be the key into courtly society and the rank of *chevalier*. With every list given to Jehan by Madame, he is guided on the proper consumption for himself as well as others. As Jehan follows her lessons he is rewarded not only by her in the form of more money and instruction, but he receives acclaim and support from those at court. His upward social mobility is due to fashion, not fighting. Before Jehan leaves to compete at other courts for fame and riches he had already defeated his peers in terms of fashion thus already ensuring his success in his goal to be a *chevalier*.

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27 Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, p. 31.