

BETWEEN STABILITY AND TRANSFORMATION
Textual Traditions in the Medieval Netherlands

Q U E E S T E 23

2016 / 2



TIJDSCHRIFT
OVER JOURNAL OF
MIDDELEEUWSE MEDIEVAL
LETTERKUNDE LITERATURE
IN DE IN THE LOW
NEDERLANDEN COUNTRIES

Mutable Stability, a Medieval Paradox

The Case of Le Roman de la Rose

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It has become *de rigueur* to view the Middle Ages as a period of textual mutability, defined by what we sometimes refer to as *le texte mobile*. My own work over the last decades has certainly argued this cause. The rationale for relativism was a necessary corrective in the face of entrenched views asserting the primacy of a fixed text established by critical methods intended to purge the work of ‘errors in transmission’.¹

Yet even those who argue, to the contrary, that ‘transmission errors’ often represent creative ‘participation’ by a talented scribe, must recognize the attraction of a stable work. After all, despite an extraordinary record of innovation, invention, and discovery, the Middle Ages are an era that resisted change in and for itself. And yet this same veneration of conservative values underlies a fascinating paradox of medieval culture: its delicate and seemingly contradictory balance between stability, on the one hand, and transformation, on the other. It may be that only an era that saw no contradiction in promulgating an omnipotent, unchanging divinity, which was at the same time a dynamic principle of construction and transformation, could have managed the paradox of what I want to call ‘mutable stability’.

While we can find this principle at work in a number of domains – not least in the myriad art forms known as ‘Romanesque’, as Meyer Shapiro long since noted – I will limit myself in this paper to the manuscript transmission of vernacular works of literature. In particular, I want to look longitudinally at transmission practices of manuscripts of the *Roman de la Rose* to demonstrate several aspects of mimetic transformation of the text that illustrate a basic principle of stability, namely, *the ability of an object to adjust to load changes without any reduction in performance*.²

What exactly does this mean? How can we speak of a literary work – medieval or otherwise – in terms of ‘stability’, ‘load stress’, and ‘performance dynamic’? Strange as it may seem, the terms make sense once one recognizes manuscript transmission as both a technology and a sophisticated model of communication, in essence, a dynamic system. Dynamic systems are designed to perform functions within proscribed parameters that define its nature. Since each performance results in input stresses of one kind or another, these forces necessarily produce changes as the system adapts to the pressure. That’s only to be expected since no two performance-situations will ever be identical. If systems cannot accommodate load stress, while still performing

¹ See Nichols 1994; Nichols 1997; Nichols 1995; Nichols 1989; Nichols 1990; Nichols 1991; Nichols 1992; Nichols 2006a; Nichols 2007; Nichols 2006b; Nichols 2008a; Nichols 2011.

² *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* 1967, 2217 defines ‘stability’ similarly as: ‘the property of a body that causes it when disturbed from a condition of equilibrium or steady motion to develop forces or moments that restore or adapt the body to the original equilibrium or motion’.

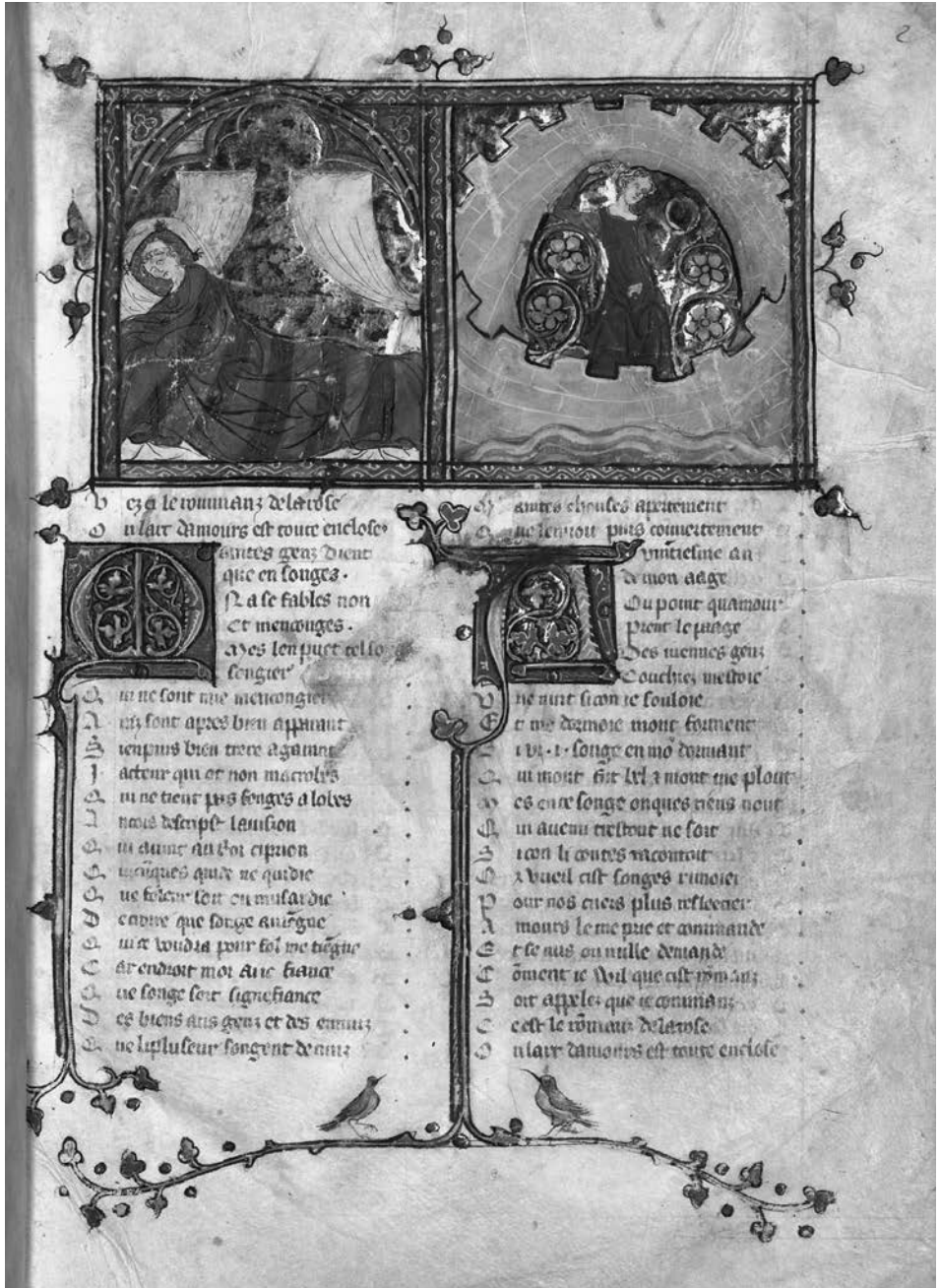


Fig. 1 Example of complex manuscript folio page. *Roman de la Rose*. Munich: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Cod. gall. 17, f. 1r. Paris, early 15th century.

Fig. 2 Example of a royal presentation manuscript. Coronation of Philip VI (1328). *Grandes Chroniques de France*. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms fr. 2813, f. 353v. Paris, 14th century.



the functions for which they are designed, they will fail. Consequently well-designed dynamic structures are those flexible enough to accommodate new demands, while still performing essential functions (which also evolve over time).³

Medieval vernacular manuscripts are sophisticated examples of systems designed primarily to transmit the text of literary works along with other kinds of visual and text-based information deemed appropriate for a reader's appreciation and comprehension of the work. As the following observations and illustrations (Figures 1-4) demonstrate, folios or leaves of vernacular manuscripts are mixed media constructions combining a number of constituents as noted.

- A physical base (parchment or rag paper) supporting a text layout, usually in two columns written in one of a number of the writing styles developed during the period (Figure 1);
- Marginal decorations that frame and separate the columns, sometimes connected to the writing by elaborately-formed lines emerging from stylized, enlarged initials;
- Elaborately-crafted, colored historiated or decorated initials often three or four lines deep at the beginning of a text section (Figure 2);
- Smaller initials in alternating colors (often red and blue) meant to signal textual subsections (Figure 3);

³ With the advent of an increasingly more complex environment for computational and Internet technology, stability engineering has evolved from such areas as physics and structural engineering to address problems of distributed applications. Pankaj Garg and his collaborators at Hewlett-Packard Laboratories define the paradox of mutable stability in a computational environment as follows: '... a distributed application is stable when it can provide an intended level of service over time, as the underlying hardware, networks, and usage patterns change. [...] Being stable means that an application is not going to exhibit chaotic or catastrophic behavior when there are perturbations [to the system].' Garg et al. 1996, 1-2.

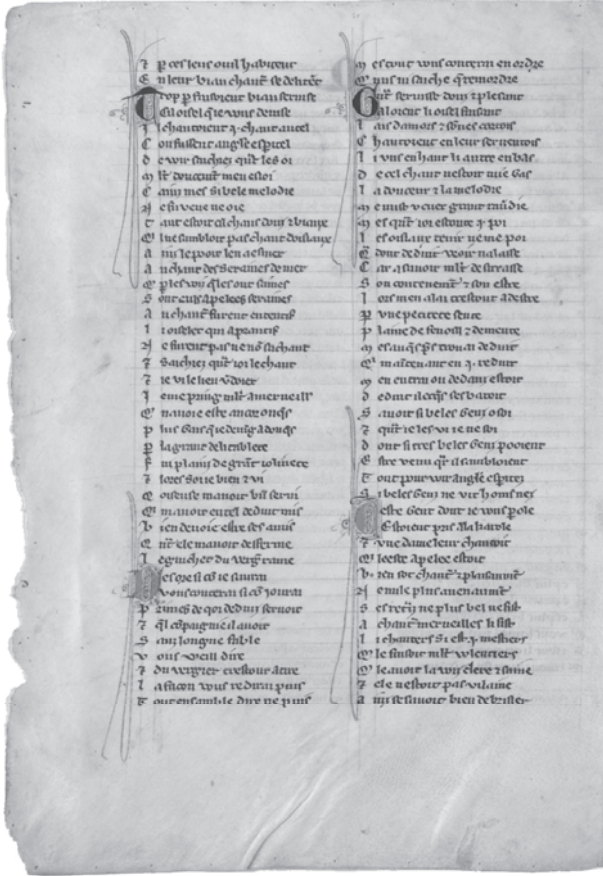


Fig. 3 Alternating pattern of red and blue decorated initials. *Roman de la Rose*. Dartmouth College, ms Rauner Codex 3206, f. 5v. Paris, 14th century.

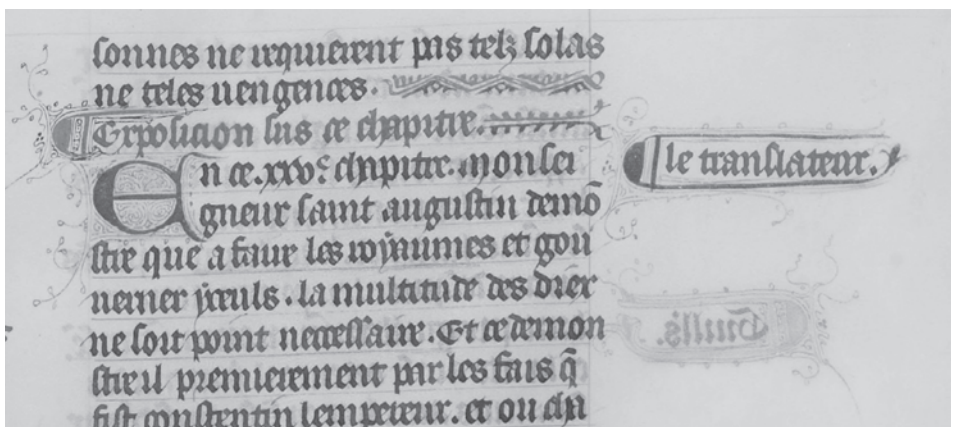


Fig. 4 Manuscript folio with gloss added by scribe or translator: 'Exposition sur ce chapitre. Le translateur'. Saint Augustin, *Cité de Dieu*, translation by Raoul de Presles undertaken at the behest of King Charles V. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms fr. 22912, f. 269r. Paris, 1375-1377.

Fig. 5 Elaborate presentation manuscript. Christine de Pizan presents her book – the manuscript of her collected works – to Queen Isabeau de Bavière, wife of King Charles VI. London, British Library, MS Harley 4431, f. 3r. Paris, 1401–1410.



- Miniature paintings of various sizes offering a visual commentary on the narrative;
- Red-lettered rubrics in the text columns to guide the reader by commenting on narrative events, identify speakers in a dialogue; or describe scenes in a miniature.
- Glosses on the original intercalated with the text (Figure 4).
- Sometimes marginal or bas-de-page drawings, paintings, or comments are found that may date from the production of the manuscript, or else represent later additions.

In short, vernacular manuscripts evolved during the thirteenth and especially the fourteenth centuries into complex semiotic artifacts. While the basic function of the manuscript remained constant – that is, the need to represent and transmit written works – the production of individual manuscripts could be affected by such issues as: cost, purpose, changes in artistic style, place of production, public taste, fluctuations in moral tolerance (in the case of works – like the *Roman de la Rose* – with controversial passages), or the effort to render older works in a contemporary mode, to name but a few such causes.

We know, for example, that occasion and patron affected not just the appearance of a codex, but also essential aspects of content. A copy of a work intended for a royal or noble patron typically may boast such refinements as extensive illumination, an elegant scribal hand, well-executed historiated and decorated initials, well-planned rubrication, brilliant marginal decorations, glosses on the text, all executed on the finest parchment (Figure 5). We find, on the other hand, versions of the same work produced

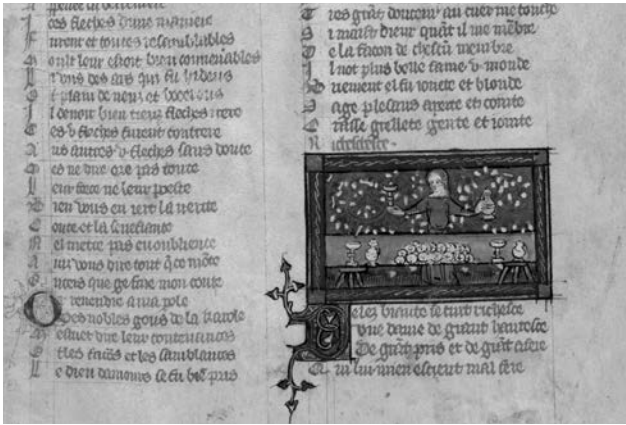


Fig. 6 'Simple' relatively inexpensive manuscript. *Roman de la Rose*. Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, ms W 143, f. 8r. Paris, c. 1325.

less expensively – perhaps for a merchant of modest means – containing far fewer (and less refined) illuminations, with simple decorated initials, no marginal decoration, no vine motifs framing text columns, a less elegant script, minimal rubrication, and the whole often copied with less care on coarser parchment or paper (Figures 6 and 11).

When one adds to these characteristics the variable of size – codices could be, and often were, voluminous – it's evident that even the best-laid scheme would have difficulty keeping all these independent components within the prescribed system. It's true that master scribes did plan the layout of a given codex with great care. Execution of the plan, however, introduced another set of variables. Factors such as skill, experience, reliability, attentiveness, distraction, fatigue, failure to complete the project, et cetera, were but a few of the dynamic variables affecting the finished product. And then, again, the context of production added yet another pressure affecting the outcome. Manuscripts were not copied in isolation, but in scriptoria where other works were being produced simultaneously. It would be naïve to imagine that environment would not favor a 'dynamic of influence' as scribes – consciously or unconsciously – transferred techniques, or even bits of text or image, from one work to another. And yet, in spite of all these pressures, manuscripts did manage to perform as intended precisely because they were able not simply to accommodate change, but to transform it creatively.

That's why it's important to recognize that load stress on the codex as dynamic system came as much from the function of the structure – what it was designed to do – as from external forces (which were themselves considerable). And the chief source for both was the phenomenon of transmission itself. From the earliest extant vernacular manuscripts all the way to the end of the Middle Ages, textual transmission performed the seemingly contradictory task of reproducing a work composed in the past whose name assured its recognition and thus knowledge of its plot and characters, while nonetheless rendering the new version in conformity with current taste and style so as not to make the narrative seem hopelessly archaic. This meant that for medieval literary works narrative continuity and some form of 'load change' were requisite functions of textual transmission. So true is this observation that one might say of

it what Don Fabrizio, the protagonist of Giuseppe Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo*, says of Italy: 'Things must change so they can remain the same'.

As with all *dicta*, Lampedusa's is an exaggeration. In this case, however, it's one that allows us to understand the paradox of medieval narrative forms whose 'stability' over time – in some cases over several centuries – depends on what I call the generative – or *regenerative* – force of transmission. Why 'regenerative' if transmission involves re-producing the 'same' work from one representation to another? The answer to that question involves recognizing the complex forces at play in the transmission of medieval texts, beginning with concepts like 'the same' and 'seeing' or 'perspective'. After all, in a culture where the technology of transmission depends on copying each text by hand, what the scribe sees, or thinks she or he sees, must be factored into our definition of 'sameness' when comparing original and copy.

In the event, 'sameness', for the medieval mind had a very different connotation from our modern senses of the term. Indeed, it even involves a different process of perception and imagination. Whereas in our age of mechanical and digital reproduction, we are used to standards of 'exactness' for things we recognize as identical, medieval people had neither the means nor the expectation to make 'same' and 'exact imitation' synonymous. Indeed, one may even question the existence at that time of such a concept as 'exact imitation', at least as we understand it.

The reason may be found in texts that involved 'seeing,' which was a never failing topic of interest and curiosity not only in lyric, epic, romance and drama, but also in theories of vision. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed a growing and intense exploration of vision theory with major treatises by Ibn al Haytham or Alhazen, Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, and Witelo.⁴ Their expositions reflected profoundly on the relationship between perceiver and perceived, treating such fundamental topics as the mechanics of vision, geometric perspectivism, and other aspects of the interaction between the knowing subject and the object known.

No thirteenth-century poem exploited new theories of vision and perception more innovatively than did the *Roman de la Rose* in its two unequal sections: Guillaume de Lorris's modest 4,000+ line beginning (c. 1235 C.E.) and Jean de Meun's exuberant and baggy continuation of some 18,000 lines (c. 1280-85 C.E.). Vision and truth are major themes in the *Rose*, as well as key factors differentiating Guillaume de Lorris from his more skeptical – not to say cynical – successor. From the beginning of the poem, Guillaume explores the 'sameness' of different forms of representation. His dream vision recounts adventures that he assures us are so similar to what he experienced in real life as to be virtually identical. He confidently equates seeing and believing in the preface to his poem, which famously opens with the lines (Figure 7):

Maintes gens dient que en songes
 N'a se fables non et mençonges;
 Mes l'en puet tex songes songier
 Qui ne sont mie mençongier, (ll. 1-4)⁵

⁴ See Nichols 2008b; see also Lindberg 1996; also pertinent is Simon 2003.

⁵ Poirion 1974.

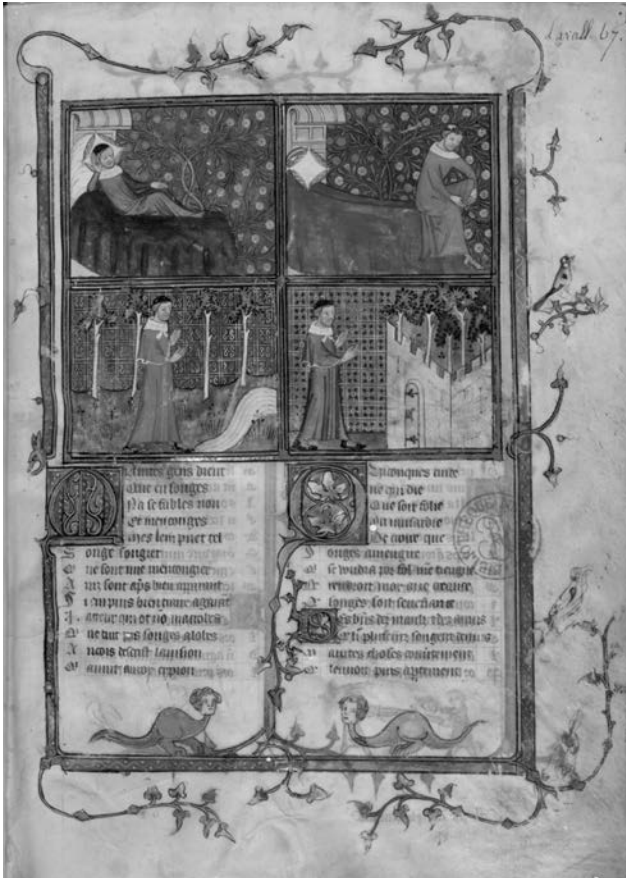


Fig. 7 *Roman de la Rose*, incipit: 'Maintes gens dient que en songes...'. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 25526, f. 1r. Paris, 14th century.

(People say that dreams are nothing but lies and stories; but it's possible to dream dreams that are not at all mendacious...)

He continues by saying that at twenty years of age he dreamed a story every detail of which subsequently befell him in 'real life'.

Lor vi un songe en mon dormant
 Qui mout fu biaux et mout me plot;
 Mes onques riens ou songe n'ot
 Qui avenu tretout ne soit
 si cum li songes recontoit. (ll. 26-30)

(Then I saw a dream while sleeping that was very beautiful and pleased me greatly; for there was nothing in the dream that did not come to pass exactly as the dream had foretold.)

But Guillaume pushes this theme still further to motivate the primal scene of the whole poem. For the work to become, as he asserts, *Li romans de la Rose / Ou l'art d'Amor est toute enclose* (The *Romance of the Rose* / where the art of Love is completely enclosed, ll. 37-38), Guillaume must demonstrate love as first and foremost an

image process and imaginative experience whereby the lover's gaze appropriates the beloved-as-perception and then projects it onto his psyche so as to alter the way he perceives himself and the world.

Classical and medieval theories of the soul viewed the imagination as the psyche's 'image processing' faculty.⁶ They also recognized perception as a destabilizing agent provoking change in the viewer who performs perception by assuming aspects of the viewed object.⁷ So when Guillaume speaks of 'enclosing the art of love', he uses the expression both literally and figuratively. Literally, to describe 'enclosing' the image of the beloved in the lover's psyche, and figuratively to express the reprocessing of this perception into the 'Rose': the name given to the beloved after her Narcissus-inspired metamorphosis into a projection of the lover's libido.⁸


6 Medieval philosophy found Aristotle's hylomorphic concept of psyche congenial to Christian doctrine, not least because of the active role of perception in mediating change while revealing essential and persistent characteristics of an entity. Aristotle sees the *psyche* as the essence of being or existence: 'the principle of life or of animation.' In consequence, it perceives the body as intimately linked to mental processes. As Martha Nussbaum and Hilary Putnam note, it not only 'deals with the beings and doings of all substances,' it also 'asks some very global and general questions about all these things, and two questions in particular. First, it asks: How do and should we explain or describe the changes we see taking place in the world? [...] Aristotle holds that any coherent account of change must pick out some entity that is the "substrate", or underlying persistent thing, of that change, *the thing to which the change happens and which persists itself as one and the same thing throughout the change.* [...] Second, he asks: How do and should we answer "what is it?" questions about the items in our experience? What accounts give us the best stories about the identities of things, *as they persist through time?* [...] What is it that must remain one and the same, if we are going to continue to regard it as the same individual? [...] Any good account of change will need to single out as its underlying substrates or subjects items that are not just relatively enduring, but also relatively definite or distinct items that can be identified, characterized as to what they are.' Nussbaum & Putnam 1992, 28–29.

7 Christopher Shields, the Oxford philosopher and specialist on *De anima*, points to hylomorphism as one reason why 'Aristotle is happy to speak of an affected thing as receiving the form of the agent which affects it and of the change consisting in the affected thing's "becoming like" the agent (*De Anima* ii 5, 418a3–6; ii 12, 424a17–21)'. Shields 2011. Gerard Watson points to the importance of *phantasia* as the activity responsible for such changes: 'Aristotle describes *phantasia* in the *De Anima* as a movement which comes about in beings that perceive of things of which there is perception and because of an actual perception. It is similar to perception, and beings which possess it often act or are affected in accordance with it (iii.3, 428b10–17) (p. 100). [...] If *phantasia* is to be considered to belong to consciousness [...] we must look for it among the potentialities in virtue of which we are enabled to judge and arrive at truth or falsity, among which we also count capacities like perception, belief, knowledge and intuitive apprehension (p. 105–106). [...] Aristotle considered *phantasia* central to all human cognition [...] [which is] how we come to act on our understanding of good and bad. He says that to the intellectual soul *phantasmata* serve as sense-perceptions, *aisthēmata*. When [the *psyche*] asserts or denies something to be good or bad, it avoids or pursues it. And that, he says, is why the soul never thinks without a *phantasma* (431a8–17) (p. 108–109)'. Watson 1982.

8 There is a venerable medieval tradition of treatises 'on the soul', or psyche, usually called *De anima*, from Aristotle to Augustine and on down to Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*. These treatises locate the processing of external visual stimuli in that part of the psyche called the imagination. On these accounts, the imagination produces *phantasiae* or images as a mimesis of external visual stimuli. We must understand 'mimesis', however, as performative rather than a passive reproduction of stimuli. From a modern standpoint, we can picture the imagination in terms of image processing. In consequence, each individual processes visual stimuli in a unique way, where 'seeing' means perception of a phenomenal reality processed through the mind/psyche of the viewer. Medieval perception is thus a dual process of ingesting a 'raw' image of phenomenal reality and refracting it through analytic concepts previously formulated by acquired knowledge, or, in the case of erotic love, through the libido, or even – as Guillaume would argue – through refinement of libidinal forces by the 'laws' or 'art' of love. This means, of course, that perception so conceived privileges not 'objective reality,' a faithful reproduction or copy of the object one has seen, but an affectively constructed version. The dynamic faculty of the medieval imagination spans, then, the space separating 'raw' perception and performative representation. The literature on this topic is extensive, but see the following: Frede 1992; Wilkes 1992; Bynum 1993, particularly 100–107; Lowe 1992, particularly 112–115, 119–123; Charlton 1992, especially 205 ff.

ne li abrie faisoient ombre
 es nen sai pas dur le nombre
 ar puz ruisseaus q' deuz
 or fait feu par conduir
 en alour leue auai faisan
 ne noise douce & plasant
 me les ruisseaus & les rues
 es fontaines clers & aues
 oingnoit leire bassere & due
 ust y pouoir on sadue
 ouhier come sur vne come
 ar la tie estoit moite toute
 ar les fontaines uenour
 aut herle come y couuenoit
 es mont lafere embillour
 i leus qui delitable estoit
 uil haioit touz iourz plente
 eflours & yuer & este
 tolete haioit mont bele
 parueche fresche & nouuele
 leurs por iannes & imelles
 t des blanches por meuelles
 rop estoit celle teure come
 yelopee estoit & pinte
 e fleuis de duises couleurs
 one mot estoit l'one lodeus
 e wus feui pas longue fable
 u lieu plasant & delitable
 rant men couuendia taur
 ar ie ne pouie ueraine
 uuegier toute la haute
 elagome delirable
 ant fu a delte & a fenestre
 ne ioi tout lafere & lectre
 uuegier cerche & ueu
 lidex d'amois ma feu
 ndentres enclpant
 on leventes qui arent
 ue la treste en ton leu se met
 ont lester aler la seere

En .i. trop bian leu aruag
 udermer ouie mouai
 ne fontaine souz .i. pin
 es puz charles le filz pepin
 e fu ausi biau pin veu
 t si estoit s'haue creu
 ue ou veigier nor s'lel .Abre
 edon; une pierre de marbre
 e nature p'gnt meluse
 ouz le pin la fontaine assise
 or deden; la pierre estapes
 i tout d'antont les pentes
 u disoient quillec dessus
 e meurt le biau narcissus
 e narcissus qui vit son ombre en la fontaine



Narcissus fu .i. damoiseus
 de uue amors & tant en les ruisseaus
 tant le fist amour destrandre
 tant le fist plour & plandre
 uil li couuint s'endre lame
 ar equo vne haute d'ace
 auoir plus une q'ene nec
 fu pour lui si mai mece
 nelle li dist quel li deuoit
 amouir ou elle se mouit
 es al fu pour sa q'ite haute
 lam de ad dang & de fiere
 une laoit pas otvier
 ant ten seust celle puer

Fig. 8 Roman de la Rose, Lover at Fountain of Narcissus. Munich, BSB, ms Cod. Gall. 17, f. 10v. Paris, 15th century.

In short, for Guillaume the narrative involves not simply the dream vision-as-frame, but also the mechanics of ‘seeing as loving’ – the erotic equivalent of seeing as believing.⁹ The mechanics involve both physical and psychic perception leading to affective identification between perceiver, perception, and perceived object. Love for Guillaume is fate, that is a transformation of self from at least the appearance of freedom to a being who willingly exchanges independent agency for a life governed by strict rules of conduct decreed by *Amour* (the god of love). In this process, the eyes – what an agent looks at and how he controls his vision – are central to Guillaume’s thesis of the self-as-agent of its own fate – a view Jean de Meun shares with his predecessor (though for very different reasons). On Guillaume’s account, the eyes are impersonal mediators serving to mirror the external world to the Lover’s psyche.

In the famous scene at the mythic ‘Fountain of Narcissus’ when the Lover, peering into the pool, sees not himself on the surface, but the image of the beloved refracted by *deus pierres de cristal* (two crystal gems, l. 1538) deep down at the bottom, the limpid pool and twin crystals become the head and eyes of the lover when viewed from inside the skull. The *deus pierres de cristal* are not simple lenses. They are instead prisms or mirrors that bend and distort as they refract, in the manner described by thirteenth-century optical treatises. It is here that Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun diverge in their understanding of the transparency of perception. But while they come to different conclusions, it’s interesting to note that *le regard* (the gaze) and the mirror as an instrument of discrete and universal imaging figure prominently in each of their parts.¹⁰ We’ll come to Jean’s views in a moment.

At this point note how, for Guillaume, sight is primarily a danger to the viewer: the poem transparently narrates how the mythic *fontaine de Narcissus* becomes the actual *mirëors perilleus* for the lover... though *not* for the reader. Indeed, miniatures of the scene emphasize its specularity (Figures 8 and 9);

C’est li mirëors perilleus,
 Ou Narcisus li orguilleus
 Mira sa face et ses yex vers,
 Dont il jut puis mors touz envers.
 Qui en cest mirëor *se* mire
 Ne puet avoir garant ne mire
 Que tel chose a ses yex ne voie
 Qui d’amer l’a tost mis en voie.
 Maint vaillant homme a mis a glaive
 Cis mirëors, car li plus saive,
 Li plus preu, li miex afetié
 I sont tost pris et aguetié. (ll. 1571–1582)

⁹ Chapters 2 and 3 of Kretzman, Kenny & Pinborg 1982 offer an excellent overview of the medieval reception of Aristotle. See also ‘Medieval Aristotelianism’ in Craig 1998.

¹⁰ Although Aquinas did not write his commentary on Aristotle’s *De Anima* until c. 1267 – well after Guillaume’s *Rose*, but over a decade before Jean de Meun wrote his continuation – Aquinas’s commentary on Book II, especially chapters 9–15 (p. 176–226), and his observations on Book III, particularly on *phantasia* and Intellect chapters 5–14 (p. 327–402), are pertinent to Guillaume de Lorris’s positive exposition, and even more cogently to the more nuanced and ironic debates of Jean de Meun. See Pasnau 1999.



Fig. 9 *Roman de la Rose*, Lover gazing into Fountain of Narcissus. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms fr. 1559, f. 32v. Paris, 13th century.

(This is the perilous mirror, / in which the arrogant Narcissus / regarded his countenance and his blue-grey eyes, / whence he was felled quite dead. / Whoever looks at himself in this mirror / must abandon hope of a cure / for whatever his eyes perceive / he will be on the way to loving. / This mirror has put many a valiant man to the sword / for the wisest / the bravest, the most confident / are soon ambushed and captured.)

Guillaume's dramatic evocation of the Narcissistic fate awaiting unwary viewers of this mirror may well distract the reader from noting the abrupt shift in mode from the lines just above where the mirror appears as a useful – even beneficent – visual instrument. Now one finds a more ambiguous quality to the fountain's specular revelations. The picturesque landscape recedes to the background as the mirror probes the most secret recesses of the garden and its inhabitants... or at least those whom the narrative will henceforth pursue.

Si sont cil cristal merueilleus
 Et tel force ont que tous li leus,
 Arbres et flors, et quanqu'aorne
 Li vergiers, i pert tous a orne.
 Et por faire la chose entendre
 Un exemple vous vueil aprendre:
 Les choses qui li sont encontre
 Et y voit l'en sans couverture

Et lor color et lor faiture,
 tretout aussi vous di par voir
 Que li cristal, sans decevoir,
 Tout l'estre du vergier accusent
 A ceus qui dedens l'iaue musent;
 Car touz jors, quel que part qu'il soient,
 Grant partie du vergier voient;
 Et s'il se tornent, maintenant
 Pueent veoir le remanant.
 Si n'i a si petite chose,
 Tant soit repote ne enclose,
 Dont demonstrance n'i soit faite
 Com s'el ert es cristaus portraite. (ll. 1549–1570)

(These are the marvellous crystals / that have such power that all the places / the trees and flowers, and whatever adorns / the orchard, appears all spread out in them. / So you may clearly understand / I want to give you an example: / Just as the mirror reveals / things that are opposite it / and one sees things clearly in it / both their form and colour, / so I say to you in truth / that the crystals without deception, / reveal every bit of the orchard / to those who contemplate the water; / for at all times and no matter what part it be, / they see the greater part of the orchard; / and now if they turn themselves a bit / they'll be able to see the rest. / There is not the smallest thing, / no matter how hidden or covered, / that will not be revealed / exactly as it was portrayed in the crystals.)

Clearly the mirror is the same in both instances – Guillaume's prismatic 'crystals' embedded in limpid water. Where difference enters the picture, as it were, is in the *kind* of contemplation in question: *mirer* versus *se mirer*, which we can characterize as transitive versus intransitive looking.¹¹ Using a mirror to see the natural world spread out before one's eyes may inform the viewer and even offer aesthetic pleasure, but it poses no danger. In the event, the mirror serves simply as an instrument to contemplate (*muser*) the world around one. That being the case, why does Guillaume insist so forcefully on the mirror's ability to probe – *sans decevoir* – everything before it? Why does it matter if a scene we contemplate for our own amusement is faithfully reproduced?

Aside from the fact that Guillaume maintains that *everything* in his dream vision will turn out to be 'true', he emphasizes the verisimilitude of specular representation as a critical component of his moral philosophy. It matters very much whether the mirror reflects without deception (*sans decevoir*) because *li cristaus* determine *two* kinds of erotic love: one benevolent – or at least morally defensible – the other deadly. When *li cristaus* are the medium of the transitive gaze that cathects affectively with another being, the narrative lies within the bounds of *fin'amors* (courtly love). This is the mirror-fountain in which 'Cupid, the son of Venus, / sewed the seeds of Love, / which colour the fountain' (1588–1590). And so:

¹¹ The Latin verb *miro*, meaning 'to wonder', connotes the notion of *meraviglia* or 'awe' akin to the marvellous that reflexive sight associated with 'mirroring' phenomena in early societies. It comes into Old and Middle French with the connotation of absorptive or attentive looking, *regarder attentivement*. It also expresses the action of *viser* 'to take aim at'. Grimas 1992, 417b.

Por la grainne qui fut semee
 Fu celle fontainne clamee
 La Fontaine d'Amors par droit,
 Dont plusor ont en lor endroit
 Parlé en romans et en livre. (ll. 1595–1599)

(Because of the seed which was sewn / was this fountain named / the Fountain of Love by right, / of which more than a few have, in their places, / spoken in books and romances.)

In this scenario, Guillaume casts the eyes-qua-mirror as an impersonal instrument of fate, linking lover and beloved in a unitary vision. In this monovisual erotic world, seeing is fate because one becomes what one perceives. Psychic image processing shapes a narrative 'romance' purporting to show how duality dissolves into unity: 'two hearts become one', 'two selves merge into one', and so on.¹² The logic that motivates this story springs from the supposition that transitive erotic perception and other-directed aesthetic appreciation can overcome the vision of the world as intransitive, impersonal, and exclusionary – Ovid's lesson in the Narcissus myth.¹³

But what about the other face of the mirror, the erotic gaze that turns deadly? Following Guillaume's lead, we can call this the 'Narcissus principle,' which he evokes when he retells Ovid's story of Narcissus (ll. 1425–1522). Guillaume's elaborate revision of his model embeds the principle of specular representation in a strongly ambivalent semiotic force field. Lest the reader miss the point of the Narcissus principle, he reformulates it in an exemplary double couplet (ll. 1571–74) quoted above: *C'est li mirëors perilleus, / Ou Narcissus li orgueilleus / Mira sa face et ses yex vers, / Dont il jut puis mors touz envers* (This is the perilous mirror, / in which the arrogant Narcissus / regarded his countenance and his blue-grey eyes, / whence he was felled quite dead.)

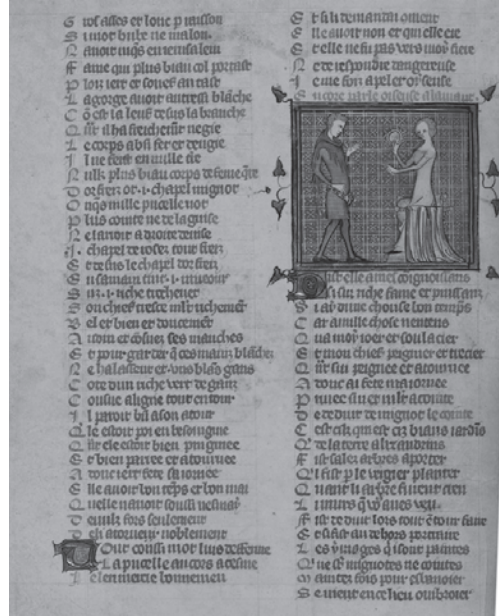
The Narcissus principle occurs when *li cristaus* are used reflexively (*se mirer*) as a mirror turned back on oneself in an intransitive, deadly gaze. Although the Ovidian reference seems sufficient to convey its negative valence, Guillaume renders it doubly lethal by melding the Christian tradition of the seven deadly sins with the classical model. In Christian iconography, the mirror symbolizes the sin of *luxuria* 'luxury', whose Latin connotations include 'wantonness', 'extravagant living', 'excess', 'dissipation', and 'lust' – all states or desires where vision was believed to figure prominently.

In Christian iconography the mirror signifies luxury's penchant for self-contemplation and extravagant toilette. Émile Mâle long ago pointed out the figure of Luxury in the rose window at Notre-Dame de Paris: a voluptuous woman holding a mirror

¹² For a logical exposition of this phenomenon, see Aquinas's commentary to §431A17–B2 of *De Anima*, entitled 'Phantasms are like sense objects'. Op. cit. III, 12, ¶¶142–195, Pasnau 1999, 384–385.

¹³ Tarrant 2004, Liber III, ll. 339–401 (Echo), 402–510 (Narcissus). Ovid juxtaposes Echo and Narcissus precisely as examples of the failure of reciprocal erotic representation: Echo as intransitive sound, and Narcissus as 'intransitive' gaze. Echo: 'inde latet silvis nulloque in monte videtur, / omnibus auditur: sonus est, qui vivit in illa'. ('She hides in the forest, no longer seen on the hills, / heard by all: it is sound that lives in her.' III: 400–401). Narcissus: 'dumque bibit, visae correptus imagine formae / spem sine corpore amat, corpus putat esse, quod umbra est'. ('While he drinks, he's seized by the image of a reflection: he loves desire without a shape, for the body he thinks he sees is but a shadow', III: 416–417).

Fig. 10 *Oiseuse*, holding mirror, admits Lover to Jardin de Déduit. *Roman de la Rose*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Selden Supra 57, f. 18v. Paris, 14th century.



while primping.¹⁴ Guillaume himself invokes the type with a fifty-line virtuoso description of the svelte and comely *Oiseuse* ('Indolence'), the gatekeeper of the Garden of Pleasure (*le Jardin de Déduit*, ll. 525–574). When the Lover finally discovers the discrete gate into the garden, *Oiseuse* greets him holding a mirror in one hand (Figure 10):

Un chapel de roses tout frois
 Ot dessus le chapel d'orfrois.
 En sa main tint un mireor;
 Si ot d'un riche treceor
 son chef trecié mout richement. (ll. 555–559)

(A circlet of roses fresh with dew / she wore above a gold-worked circlet. In her hand she held a mirror; / she'd woven a rich ribbon / elegantly into her hair.)

The long encomium to *Oiseuse* as a paragon of courtly beauty and elegance signals a major shift from the world outside the Garden where the Lover has heretofore been wandering, and the superheated atmosphere within. The paean to *Oiseuse* is the first visual test Guillaume sets for the Lover in the Garden to see whether he has the ability to apprehend the underlying reality of the world he has just entered. While the Lover takes *Oiseuse* at face value for an attractive attendant, the reader recognizes the disjunction between appearance and reality, literal and figurative meaning. More exactly, the reader asks why the poet bothers to suspend the narrative just when the Lover finally gets into the Garden in order to indulge in a virtuoso lyric display? After all,

¹⁴ Mâle 1958, 117–118 and Fig. 57. This work is a reprint of an edition published in New York in 1913.

Oiseuse seems to be only a minor character, and one that we will not see again. And why should some thirty-two lines (out of fifty) of this portrait be devoted to a minute description of the woman's face, hair, and neck, while the remaining eighteen lines describe her rich raiment and elegant toilette?

It can hardly be the case that Guillaume, having just devoted nearly three hundred fifty lines to personifying courtly vices on the exterior wall of the Garden, now seeks to apply the same treatment to the 'real' personages the Lover encounters inside. As it happens, the heightened imagery of Guillaume's portrait of *Oiseuse* in fact makes a break with the previous section. It's in keeping with his technique of using visually descriptive passages to make a transition from one section of his poem to another. The technique is a logical one for a dream vision. We recognize this transition after reading barely a few lines of the seductive poetry Guillaume deploys for *Oiseuse's* portrait. The lingering gaze the lyric bestows on her, the caress of the poetic cadences bearing softly mellifluous similes, all these and more subtly perform the absorptive gaze of the mirror turned toward self-contemplation. Rhetorically, we recognize ekphrasis – poetry's admiring gaze watching itself outdo painting – as a verbal analogy to Luxury's intransitive mirror gaze. But Guillaume offers less subtle clues to *Oiseuse's* heritage. Her lyric portrait incorporates a number of iconographic attributes traditionally associated with Luxury.

The most obvious sign, of course, is her name: *Oiseuse*, 'Indolence', which Guillaume glosses by saying 'It was evident from her appearance that she had little to do: once she had combed her hair, groomed and dressed herself, her tasks for the day were done' (ll. 566–570). Later, she introduces herself to the Lover: 'My friends, she said, call me *Oiseuse*. I am a rich and powerful woman, and have time for everything, because I think about nothing except to play and amuse myself, and to comb and adorn my hair' (ll. 582–588). We have already learned that she wears a gold cirlet more beautiful than any maiden ever wore, and over that a second cirlet of fresh roses (ll. 551–556).

Oiseuse has the distinction of being the first allegorical personification whom we meet in the *Rose*. Since all the characters in the poem are personifications of positive and negative human attributes, emotions, or impulses – Delight, Love, Beauty, Riches, Reason, Danger, Jealousy, and so on – it's significant that the first 'live' figure should be a personification whose attributes, minutely detailed by Guillaume, associates her with one of the Seven Deadly Sins: Luxury. We begin to see why Guillaume's portrait emphasizes the seductiveness of *Oiseuse qua* image, a characteristic first attributed to *Luxuria* by the Roman poet Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (348–c. 410 C.E.). Born in Northern Spain, Prudentius is thought to be the first Christian poet to make extensive use of allegorical personification in his poem, *Psychomachia* or *Battle for the Soul*.

In his allegorical combat between the cardinal Virtues and Vices for the possession of the human soul, Prudentius paints an unforgettable portrait of *Luxuria*, as a paladin in the host of the Vices who nearly succeeds in vanquishing the soldiers of Virtue not by armed combat, but by overwhelming them sensually, beginning with their sight. *Luxuria* wheels into battle in a splendid chariot 'gleaming with precious gems of all colours, its axle of solid gold, wheels silver-spoked with platinum rims, and golden

reins guiding the horses'.¹⁵ In lieu of arrows or javelins, 'she showers the enemy lasciviously with violets, rose petals yellow garlands of bright lilies, red floral wreaths and baskets of flowers'. Overwhelmed by this vision of loveliness, by the sweet-smelling floral cascade, by the alluring breath she wafts over them, the combatants desire only to yield to the hedonistic scenario she sets before them.

This vision contrasts starkly with the preceding lines, which portray *Luxuria's* night of debauchery and drunkenness. As trumpets sound the call to battle, we see *Luxuria* arise from her couch and stagger unsteadily through the debris of the night's revels to answer the call. This is, of course, the image of *Luxuria* that Prudentius means for the reader to superimpose on the subsequent scene when she dazzles the Virtues with her extravagant equipage. We are invited to register – and deplore! – the misprision of the soldiers blinded to 'reality' by *Luxuria's* theatricalized image.

Prudentius relies for her unmasking on contemporary discussions of the nature of the sins *Luxuria* represents. Initially denoted in Greek by the term *porneia*, then in Latin by *fornicatio*, *luxuria* had replaced the first two by the end of the fourth century, undoubtedly because it referenced a broader category of sins of the flesh and of perception.¹⁶ But if they ceased to be explicit designators for this sin, *porneia* and *fornicatio* remained very much a part of its semantic field. More to our point, however, *Luxuria* came to signify the erotic gaze that turns deadly by initiating a duplicitous double vision.

If one had to put a name to Prudentius's melodramatic personification of the dual perspective *Luxuria* exemplifies, we might call it 'the parallax principle of perception'. This means that medieval concepts of narrative in the service of moral philosophy – the purpose for which allegorical personification was created – focus parallel perspectives on the same object or image. Parallel sight lines, each originating at a different location, thus converge on the object of focus from separate vantage points. Each view thus yields different facets of 'the same' object. *Luxuria* is the same figure for Prudentius as for the Virtues, but each sees something very different. Besotted by *Luxuria's* sensual onslaught, they contemplate her intransitively, whereas the poet sees her – quite literally – on the bias, obliquely. Unwittingly, the bemused virtues adopt the Narcissus gaze that binds the viewer to the surface, the reflecting plane that returns what the viewer's libidinal desire projects: a reflection of the subject's own phantasms.

An obvious avatar of Prudentius's *Psychomachia*, the *Roman de la Rose* incorporates the parallax principle of perception repeatedly. Aside from Guillaume de Lorris's and Jean de Meun's very different view of the dream vision they construct, we have the example of divergent understandings of love – the rationale of the poem – as expressed by a whole range of characters including: *Amor*, *Vénus*, *Raison*, *Le Jaloux*, *La Vieille*, *Nature*, *Génius*, *Pygmalion*, or the Lover himself at various points. But conflic-

¹⁵ Thomson 1949, 301–302.

¹⁶ See Bloomfield 1952. Bloomfield calls Evagirus of Pontus (d. A.D. 400) 'the father of the seven cardinal sins' (p. 57). Cassian was his pupil. Evagirus's list includes *porneia* and Cassian's *fornicatio* as its Latin equivalent. Gregory the Great uses *luxuria*. Gregory's version of the Seven Deadly Sins became the authority for the Middle Ages. 'In Gregory's list *luxuria* is substituted (in seventh place) for *fornicatio*. Given the historical impact of Gregory's account this substitution now establishes itself. In Gregory *luxuria* has a wide remit. It incorporates moral blindness and self-love as well as hatred of God; indeed a little earlier it is said to destroy all virtues (*Moralia* XXI, 12)'. Berry 1994, 97.

ting views are not limited to love. In both parts of the poem, other concepts or behaviours spark vigorous debate among the characters.

This parallax factor is built into the very structure of the work from its opening lines where we learn that the principal actor (*l'Amant*) is 'the same' person as the poet; only the reader recognizes that this cannot be quite as transparent as it appears, since the poet, we learn, is five years older than the Lover, and they are engaged in very different activities: the Lover in dreaming and living an amorous adventure in a *locus amoenus*, and the poet in making the poem and reflecting on the difference in perspective between his naïve younger self and his mature poet-persona. Jean de Meun complicates this scenario still further by adding yet a third perspective, which he conceals for almost six thousand lines before revealing the death of Guillaume de Lorris after having completed only about 4,200 lines of a poem that ultimately runs to some 22,000 verses.

In picking up the pen Guillaume had dropped, as it were, Jean maintains Guillaume's fictional setting. This means following the Lover's avid pursuit of the Rose whose form reflected in the *mirëor perilleus* had bewitched him – according to *Raison* – as fatally as *Luxuria* had ensnared Prudentius's Virtues. Clearly, however, Jean's Lover and Guillaume's Lover must be very different. For one thing, once he reveals the place where Guillaume's poem ends and his begins, Jean can no longer maintain the fiction that the Lover is his younger self. Nor does he wish to do so.

From the time Jean begins his continuation at the point where *l'Amant* and *Raison* engage a dialectical analysis of *eros* versus *agape*, the Lover ceases to be an independent agent to become a spokesman for a naïvely literal worldview that other characters debate – frequently with outré theses. By casting his Lover as an interlocutor in a philosophical dialogue (à la Plato), Jean transforms the *Rose* into a scholastic *disputatio*. Throughout the vigorous dialectical exchanges, he maintains at least a semblance of the allegorical courtly romance. Indeed, he reasserts its mode forcefully even as he explodes Guillaume's view of the genre in the final scene – which can only seem shocking to those who have not grasped the implications of his dialectic and its illustrations.

Seeing how Guillaume and Jean figure as readers of their own poem(s), and how they exploit the parallax principle, we can recognize another component of generative transformation: *participation*. The *Rose* illustrates how the dynamic divergences between viewing subject and perceived object affect reading. By a logical extension, we should not be surprised that it affected the transmission of literary texts as well. We can better understand the philosophical implications of participation, however – and for the Middle Ages, they were crucial – if we ask why the interaction between perceiver and perceived was so critical?

The answer reflects a major difference between theories of perception in the ancient and medieval worlds. For the medieval period, perception implicates the principle of resemblance, and that, in turn, implicates philosophical anthropology. Augustine illustrates the concept in Book VI of *Confessions* where he recounts how he had been 'particularly struck with one of the themes of Ambrose's preaching in Milan in

the year 386, the theme of man's being made in the image of God'.¹⁷ It was Ambrose, he tells us, who first made him understand what – as a Manichee – he had found incomprehensible. Namely, how man could be to the image of God, how this could be understood without implying an anthropomorphic concept of the deity?¹⁸

Whereas Ambrose spoke of 'man's being to God's image and likeness, without distinguishing the two concepts of image and likeness',¹⁹ Augustine's more analytical mind sought to differentiate and define these key terms. He did so by casting 'image' as the model and 'likeness' as its dynamic agent. In Robert Markus's classic summation, Augustine reasons as follows:

The concept of image includes the idea of likeness, for nothing can be said to be an image of something else unless it is in some way like it. Something may, however, be like something else without being its image – as two eggs are like each other, but are not one the image of the other; *hence the idea of likeness does not include that of image*. The special feature which distinguishes an image-likeness from any other likeness is that an image is somehow dependent on an original which it expresses... Examples of likeness which are also images are the likeness of a child to its parents, or of a painting or mirror-image to its original. *In all these cases the image is in some way 'dependent' on the original which it also resembles.*²⁰

Having established the logical hierarchy correlating these terms, Augustine then casts them as performative agents in a ritual for human reform and renewal based on Genesis 1,26–27. A brief look at the actual text of these two verses shows that as an acute reader of Scripture, he perceived the potential metaphysical work that the key terms of the passage, *imago* and *similitudo*, could enhance the metaphysical dimension of his spiritual program.

Genesis 1,26: et ait faciamus hominem *ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram* et praesit piscibus maris et volatilibus caeli et bestiis universaeque terrae omnique reptili quod movetur in terra

(And he said: Let us make man *to our image and likeness*: and let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts, and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the earth.)

Genesis 1,27: et **creavit** Deus hominem ad imaginem suam ad imaginem Dei **creavit illum masculum et feminam** **creavit eos**

(And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.)

If Genesis 1,26 establishes the authority of *imago* and *similitudo* as the principle of resemblance linking humans to God – with the added concept of authority over lesser

¹⁷ Markus 1964, 137.

¹⁸ *Confessions*, Book VI, 3, 4. O'Donnell 1992, vol. 1.

¹⁹ Markus 1964, 138.

²⁰ Markus 1964, 125 (italics mine). Markus extrapolates Augustine's analysis of the terms from one of the first things he wrote after his elevation to the episcopacy: *De div. quaest.* LXXXIII, 74.

beings that divine resemblance confers – the next verse offers a reading that is even more interesting from the standpoint of our inquiry. To begin with, it's a rhetorically complex, asymmetrical chiasmus *ab:b(a)* that calls attention to the repetition of the verb *creavit... creavit... creavit*, always with the same subject, God, but with three different predicates each referring to a different attribute of the created human being: (1) the collective *hominem*; (2) the deictic accusative singular *illum* – with the sense of 'that' used as a pronoun, and thus an indefinite; (3) the sexually-differentiated *masculum et feminam creavit eos*. One could hardly imagine constructing a more succinct statement of the immutability of God-as-maker opposed to the contingency of his human creations.

While God figures as the unitary creative force, humans have varying references in accord with their mutable and various states. This is an excellent example of what I will later term 'differential imitation', that is, the iteration of an object with nuanced variation. In other words, it's no accident that we find three different references to humans in this poetic verse. The references are not innocuous synonyms. Just as the verse unfolds in time, so the different designations – *hominem, illum, masculum et feminam* – suggest an inherent category instability that Augustine will point to as signaling the human potential for change. And not just a potential for change, but a full-blown philosophical anthropology predicated on the dynamic of *imago* and *similitudo* as played out in a *Bildungsparadigma* for which Augustine's own spiritual itinerary, as recounted in *Confessions*, serves as model.

On his understanding of these verses, Augustine derives the concepts of absolute likeness and absolute unlikeness as defining the twin poles of existence.²¹ He identifies absolute likeness with Scripture, that is, with God's Word, and absolute unlikeness with formless matter, that is, with what falls outside of – or fails to make itself into the image of – Holy writ. 'And so man, far from God in a place of unlikeness, is required to return to himself and to likeness with God'.²² That this scale exists as a measure of the degree of proximity or distance from God's Word, may be seen from Book VII, Chapter 12 of *De Trinitate*. Indeed, he explicitly states that the image of the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit in the Trinity assist humans to 'subsist as the image of God'. He continues:

But because that image of God was not made altogether equal to Him, as being not born of Him, but created by Him; in order to signify this, he is in such a way the image as that he is 'after the image', that is, he is not made equal by parity, but approaches to Him by a sort of likeness. *For approach to God is not by intervals of place, but by likeness, and withdrawal from him is by unlikeness.*²³

While the idea of degrees of distance or proximity imply spatial reference, that is not the case here. In the first place, it is impossible to predicate spatial reference of God. That is why something like the parallax principle cannot function when God is the object of contemplation; for not only do spatial coordinates have no meaning, but also the vantage point makes no difference since contemplation of the divine image

²¹ Markus 1964, 140.

²² Markus 1964, 140.

²³ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Book VII, 6, 12.

is an inner meditation. As such, it is the quality of the contemplation that matters. When Augustine speaks of degrees of likeness and unlikeness in divine contemplation, he conceives of something akin to what we discussed above as the ‘transitive’ and ‘intransitive’ gaze.

When a human ‘approaches God by likeness’ this betokens a receptive and open mind wholly focused on a point beyond self. It is then that one may experience that brief union with the ‘sort of likeness’ known as *theosis* or epiphany. The enlightenment accompanying that epiphany is what Augustine calls ‘being transformed by the renewing of your mind’. To become a new man is to approach the likeness of God, that is to say, ‘to be renewed to the knowledge of God, after the image of Him that created him’.²⁴

Of particular importance for our ultimate goal here is the transformative or dynamic role of likeness. As we’ve seen above, Augustine conceives a dialectical relationship between ‘image’ and ‘likeness’. Image is a model, likeness a dynamic modeling of the image. As early as 388 C.E., Gerhard Ladner tells us, in *De quantitate animae*, Augustine developed the concept of reform, conceived in terms of a revision of one’s self, which he couches in terms of ‘putting off the old man and putting on the new’.²⁵ No matter how great the revision needed by an individual to make his likeness approximate the model image, one should never imagine that the image of God is ever lost entirely. ‘The image is deformed and in need of reformation, not lost; image and likeness are there at the beginning – both at man’s primordial beginning in his paradisaical integrity, and at his own individual beginning disfigured by sin – and at the end’.²⁶

While Augustine was primarily concerned with the use of Scripture to develop a love of the mind as a key to renewing the self, later Fathers opened this dialectic to include aesthetic contemplation generally. This was logically consistent with Augustine’s paradigm since among the other attributes of the divine image was beauty, a material manifestation of the good. Furthermore, the concept of beauty as pleasing proportionality came to be a commonplace expressing the metaphysical correlation – ‘likeness’ again – linking humans to the universe at large. The idea had scriptural authority from the Book of Wisdom, Chapter 11, verse 21, where God is said to have ‘ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight’ (*...sed omnia mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti*).

While we may be able to judge proportion at a glance, abstract measures like weight, number, and measure require an engagement of the intellect with the object – scrutiny and judgment, in short forms of contemplation. For that matter, it surely did not escape the attention of the Fathers that the concept of a divinely created order based on the principles of measure, number, and weight, does not occur just anywhere in the Bible, but specifically in the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon, which begins by affirming that wisdom can never inhabit a soul given to unlikeness, but can only inhabit a soul that strives for likeness:

²⁴ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Book VII, 6, 14. Cf. Markus 1964, 140.

²⁵ Ladner 1959, 53, 198.

²⁶ Markus 1964, 142.

For perverse thoughts separate from God: and his power, when it is tried, reproveth the unwise:
For wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins.²⁷

Church Fathers sought to make full use of scriptural passages that authorized the moral value of aesthetic contemplation by the subject who engaged it. As Umberto Eco puts it: 'Is beauty something ontologically self-subsistent, which gives pleasure when it is apprehended? Or, is it rather the case that a thing appears beautiful only when someone apprehends it in such a way as to experience a certain type of pleasure?'²⁸ At the same time, they realized the value of narrowing the gap between the spiritual and the material worlds by finding ways to equate the two. By encouraging Christians to measure the world in terms of the beauty and proportion of Scripture, humans could overlay on their mundane existence a transcendent vision that was both spiritually and aesthetically pleasing.

It follows logically that artistic works should 'ordain a range of effects for the sake of human perfection, and that only this encounter of a work with the perception of it could give birth to beauty'.²⁹ This principle reveals an awareness that art had social as well as religious utility which could be formulated in rules that 'made possible the birth of an aesthetico-philosophical consciousness' that reconciled two strong currents of medieval sensibility: the spiritual and the artistic.³⁰

Knowledge was common to both kinds of sensibility, and – as Augustine insists – it requires the collaboration of the senses and the psyche. In practice, sight and hearing were the senses the Fathers considered most conducive to intellectual activity. In Augustine's hierarchy of the senses, sight and hearing were both important, but sight, because of its association with reading and inner vision ('the eye of the mind'), was paramount. As the conversion scene in *Confessions* shows, divine admonitory hearing – *et ecce audio vocem [...] quasi pueri an puella, nescio: tolle lege, tolle lege* – commands attention, but sight, the act of reading, directs understanding.³¹ Naturally, as soon as one corporeal sense had been granted the status of *maxime cognoscitivus*, 'fully involved with knowledge',³² then the other cognitive sense, hearing, could be considered. But it took the genius of Boethius to elevate hearing, and with it the concept of rhythm, onto the same footing as sight.

Boethius did so by showing that music, based as it is on rhythm, embodied the very

27 Sapientiae 1,3: 'perversae enim cogitationes separant a Deo probata autem virtus corripit insipientes'. 1,4: 'quoniam in malivolam animam non intrabit sapientia nec habitabit in corpore subdito peccatis'. *Biblia Sacra* 1983, vol. 2, 1003.

28 Eco 1988, 49.

29 Eco 1988, 50.

30 Eco 1988, 50.

31 See Augustine, *Confessions*, Book VIII, 29. O'Donnell 1992, vol. 1, 101. In his commentary on the fig tree in the garden conversion scene in VIII, 28 – *ego sub quadam fici arbore stravi* – O'Donnell identifies Augustine's reference as John 1,47–48 where seeing (*video*) structures the narrative, especially in the source for Augustine's direct quotation: '...sub arbore fici vidi te'. Other discussions of sight in Augustine's hierarchy of the senses include *De libero arbitrio libri tres*, II, vii, and *De Genesi ad litteram*, XII, 29–33, where he develops the technical connotations of *visa*, *visio* as well as his doctrine of the infallibility of intellectual vision. Agaësse & Solignac 1972, vol. II, 374–385. See also the editors' notes regarding *Les trois genres de visions, L'infailibilité de la vision intellectuelle*, and *L'objet de la vision intellectuelle*, Agaësse & Solignac 1972, vol. II, 575–585.

32 Eco 1988, 50.

notion of proportion that Wisdom 11,21 claimed as the divine principle of world order. ‘Consonance’, he writes,

which regulates all musical modulations, cannot exist without sound. But consonance is not simply an objective datum, for it has to do with a correspondence between sound and perception. Consonance is a mixture of high and low sounds striking the ear sweetly and uniformly. Both the body and the soul are subject to the same laws that govern the universe, and these are musical laws. The human soul modulates its feelings in the manner of the musical modes...³³

While the ear captures and resonates to musical harmony, ‘only the intellect is able to discriminate and appreciate the notes and chords’.³⁴

‘Only the intellect is able to discriminate and appreciate...’ Let this stand as a call to order; or at least as a reminder of my purpose, which is to explore the dialectics of ‘reform and revision’ – to use Augustine’s terms – in the transmission of vernacular literary texts. This is a matter that scholars have usually treated empirically as a question of ‘reproduction’, or copying, rather than as representation. As we know, the process involves triage of the extant manuscripts in order to postulate a ‘best text’ – by which is understood something approximating the work as the author wrote it.

The best manuscript version serves as the basis for an authoritative critical edition. Divergences from the text of the critical edition are perceived as variants due to scribal error or whimsy. Longer passages not found in the master text acquire the status of ‘interpolation’, a term, like variant, that designates a supplement. We know this story, and have all reacted to it in one form or another. Most recently, of course, many of us have argued against the concept of a fixed or master text whose coherence has been marred by variation due to incompetent scribes.

Without renouncing that concept, I would like to suggest a slightly different scenario that would enable us to situate the whole question of manuscript transmission within the history of the Patristic development of perception and aesthetic appreciation that I have been retelling here. For that history is a lesson in the sensory and intellectual engagement of reader or listener with an external object. Reading and hearing certain kinds of works do not simply impress the mind; they can change the whole being. Augustine speaks of reform or renewal – ‘putting on the new man’ – while Boethius tells how the psyche appreciates musical modes by imitating its harmonies. Hence the famous story he tells of the drunken youth from Taormina whose fury ceased when the musicians in the room changed their playing from the Phrygian to the Hypophrygian mode.³⁵

The lesson impressed on medieval folk was that reading mattered. It mattered because it was not something external, something that happened ‘out there’, beyond the self... precisely the lesson Augustine teaches in the conversion scene in *Confessions* Book VIII, 28–29. On the contrary, reading or listening involved engagement with and participation in a work. As the senses assimilated the words, and as the intellect pro-

³³ Eco 1988, 76. Quotations from Friedlein 1867, vol. 1, 3; also in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. LXIII, col. 1167–1300 (Migne 1847).

³⁴ Eco 1988, 244, n. 32.

³⁵ Eco 1988, 76–77.

cessed the sensual data, two things happened. First, the narrative became part of the reader's experience thereby 'revising' or 'reforming' his view of the world to bend it into conformity with that expressed by the work. Secondly, the reader's own worldview functioned as a force field that nuanced and 'reformatted' as it were the image of the work taking shape in the mind. In short, the reader's understanding of the work was bimodal, consisting of values and insights undeniably derived from the work, but synthesized with the reader's preexisting beliefs and understanding which undergo modification themselves in the process.

Normally, of course, these processes would not be visible. We can trace accounts of them only when they become a theme of personal meditations such as Augustine's *Confessiones*, Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae*, Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum*, treatises of various sorts, and of course literary works. I would like to suggest, however, that another source of evidence for such dynamic reading practices lies at hand, although not recognized as such. That evidence may be found in the transmission of manuscripts of the *Roman de la Rose*, the most popular vernacular French text of the Middle Ages. But what exactly do we mean by transmission? And – the corollary question – isn't it time to think of it as both a process of reading and representation?

I've been thinking a good deal lately about these questions. In fact, I have found them so compelling as to conceive a research protocol consisting of two approaches. First, I want to make a longitudinal study of *Rose* manuscripts to determine the extent to which versions vary in response to changing reading practices induced by new modes of representation. But since each manuscript reflects a particular moment and context, one needs to examine examples of other works contemporaneous with a given *Rose* manuscript. It helps if those works were produced in the same place, and if some relationship to the *Rose* can be established, as is the case with works like De-guileville's *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*. In such cases, we have examples of works that 'were reading each other', as it were. Let me explain.

'The study of Old French literature can never be divorced from the question of transmission', writes Sylvia Huot in introducing *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers*.³⁶ 'Transmission', in this case, means the insertion of a literary work into the dynamic process of rewriting, adaptation, and revision that leads Daniel Poirion to call medieval writing *manuscriture*.³⁷ In the case of the *Rose*, manuscript production in the fourteenth century signals the growing prestige of the work, which in turn stimulated the demand for more copies at all levels of society. As Pierre-Yves Badel pointed out thirty years ago, the *Rose* attained popularity in every echelon of the reading public, with manuscripts owned by members of the aristocracy, royalty, ecclesiastics, and the bourgeoisie.³⁸ He also notes that the reputation of the *Rose* meant that vernacular French literature attained a prestige akin to that of Latin.

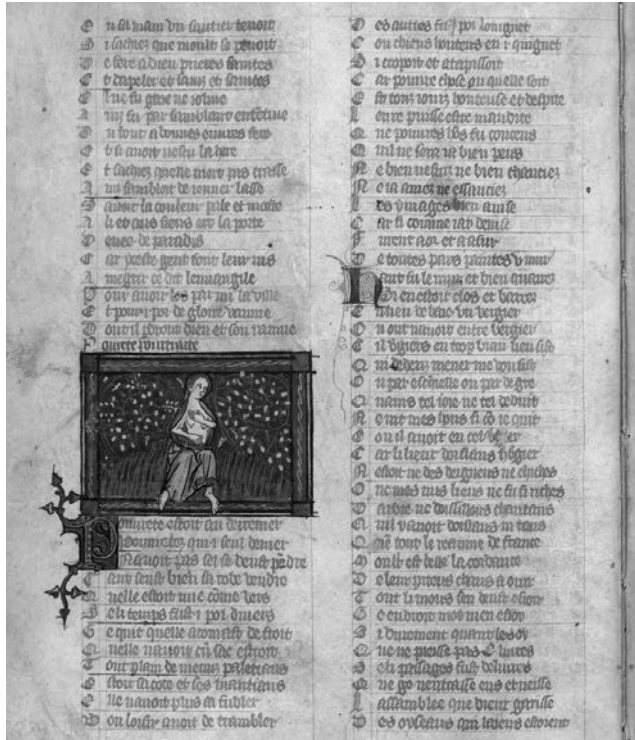
While Badel and Huot agree that the fourteenth century saw the 'making' of the *Rose* as the most prestigious vernacular work and thus a model to emulate, they focus primarily on the phenomenon of the work itself as it moves through time and space.

³⁶ Huot 1993, 3.

³⁷ Poirion 1981.

³⁸ Badel 1980.

Fig. 11 Early Portrait of an Uncourtly Characteristic: 'Povreté Pourtraite'. *Roman de la Rose*. Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, MS W 143, f. 4v. Paris, early 14th century.



Badel, in particular, traces elements of the *Rose* that later works borrow, while Huot focuses on the changes wrought on it via transmission. In other words, from their perspective manuscripts are basically a means to an end – the end being to convey the work to a public – rather than a creative initiative in their own right. On that view, the *Rose* is essentially a unitary work – however polymorphous – whose influence is unidirectional: *shaping, but not susceptible to being shaped*. From this perspective, transmission is basically a ‘mechanical’ function performed with variable fidelity to the text.

But this view ignores the dynamics of participatory reading we discussed earlier. Aesthetic contemplation, we recall, initiated a dynamic engagement with the image of the work acquired in the reading process. That image becomes a double image in the reading process. On the one hand, the force field of the work inflects the reader’s own view of the world towards the likeness of the work’s *Weltanschauung*. On the other hand, the reader’s views subtly nuance the image of the work he assimilates. In the event, the reader’s image of the work is a composite of these two forces.

Chronology is another variable that can inflect the reader’s image of the work. In this case, its aesthetic norms may be perceived by the reader as archaic, insufficiently in keeping with prevailing artistic norms of his own time. In that case, he may subtly nudge his image of the work towards the aesthetic likeness dictated by the norms of his *own* day. While this risks anachronism – which did not much trouble medieval readers – it satisfies his aesthetic sensitivity – which was, after all, one of the criteria of ‘beauty’, as we saw above.



Fig. 12 Late Portrait of Uncourtly Characteristics: 'Pape-lardie & Povreté'. *Roman de la Rose*. New York, J. Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 948, f. 11r. Paris, 1520.

In such cases, the force of the reader's own *Weltanschauung* and aesthetic sense nudge the *Rose* that he fashions towards a 'likeness' in line with contemporary aesthetic and moral modes. Parenthetically, one should say that this effect may be seen most flagrantly in the manuscript paintings, decorations and mise-en-page of late fourteenth and fifteenth century manuscripts when compared with earlier examples (Figures 11 and 12).

These facts cannot help but alter the way we think about the variety of and variation in manuscripts of a work like the *Roman de la Rose*, whose extant manuscripts extend over more than two centuries of artistic innovation. The often-considerable differences between manuscript versions tell us that the poem was admired and consequently gained prestige precisely because its transmission exhibits a dynamic process of 'differential repetition'.

Differential repetition describes the generative dynamic of transmission whereby the master scribe responsible for planning a manuscript could – and often did – produce a version that followed the main episodes of the work in question, but with differences resulting from new textual insertions, unusual rubrics and glosses, new miniatures, and so on. When we ask what motivates differential repetition and where do

the changes come from, then things begin to get interesting. Manuscript versions illustrate the generative force of medieval literary transmission, its *energeia* (ἐνέργεια) or dynamic activity that transforms as it transmits. This is why I say that manuscript transmission is an authentic form of artistic representation in the full sense of the term. But what do I mean by a ‘generative force’? And why do I associate it with *energeia*?

By ‘generative force’ I mean the ability to move or change something for a particular end. That is very close to the way Aristotle defines *energeia* as an agent of motion and change, a being-at-work. At *Metaphysics* 1050a 21–23, he comments: ‘The act is an end and the being-at-work is the act and since *energeia* is named from *ergon* it also extends to the being-at-an-end (*entelechia*)’. We find similar passages in *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *De Anima*, to name only these treatises. In *Physics* 202a 1, for example, Aristotle argues that change is an *energeia*; also a purposive acting on something is an *energeia*. In his *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics*, St. Thomas Aquinas defends Aristotle’s concept of motion as indicating that objects are not just the complex of characters they possess *now*, but also as containing other aspects they have not yet attained. Thus ‘motion is the mode in which the future belongs to the present, and is the present absence of just those particular absent things which are about to be’?³⁹

The flip side of the work’s manuscript actualization is the dialectical interaction that takes place with the context that solicits another version of a popular work. Since it is the public in a particular time and place that orders the copy (and not vice-versa), we should not be surprised to find traces of the contemporary context on the manuscript version it produces. I call the dynamic between manuscript and its context ‘differential imitation’, which is another aspect of the dynamic activity of transformation associated with *energeia*.

Here the mimetic energy flows in two directions: it is not simply the work that is being copied in the manuscript, but the whole ‘moment’, the contextual impetus for that copy at that moment in that place. And since other literary works are being created at the same time, as part of the same contextual impetus that sees the need for a new version of the *Rose*, the same generative dynamic that responds to that request also produces other literary works. Is there any reason to suppose that the generative dynamic is unidirectional?

While the *Rose* certainly does serve as a model for fourteenth century works, why should its own manuscripts not reflect the same literary actualization (*energeia*) as newer ones, especially since they’re produced at the same time? Once we accept that the more famous model is being ‘re-created’ at the same time as works that acknowledge it, then it’s not difficult to imagine a dialectic of transference in which each is made to assume attributes of the other – at least so far as the manuscript representation is concerned. That this was in fact the case would explain the prevalence of ‘interpolations’ in the *Rose* during this period, as well as the increase in miniatures, the ingenuity of their historiation, marginal and bas-de-page paintings that often form an ironic counterpoint to the narrative text, the extensive rubrication, and other innovations found in manuscript representations of the *Rose* at this time.

39 Blackwell, Spath & Thirkel 1963, 136–137.

By way of demonstrating how *Rose* manuscripts in the fourteenth century participate in the generative dialectic of literary production, one might point to a group of six manuscripts now owned by German libraries.⁴⁰ They were all produced in Paris bookshops during the course of the long fourteenth century. This group of manuscripts is particularly interesting, not least of all for having been acquired by German collectors in the nineteenth or early twentieth century precisely because of their individuality. They are important for multiple reasons, such as textual additions to Jean de Meun's section of the poem, or for the significance of their illuminations from major masters of the period, and not least of all because they have not been studied or described as a group, or even for reasons of their recent history.

The *Rose*, in the Düsseldorf Academy (MS 2, olim A.B. 142), for instance, contains two important interpolations to Jean de Meun – the Litany of Love and the Interpolation of the Privileges. This same manuscript is noteworthy for being the only *Rose* codex to exhibit a Nazi swastika, since it was seized from a German-Jewish owner in the 1930s and became part of a collection 'donated' by Hermann Göring to the Hermann Göring-Meisterschule für Malerei in Kronenburg, Germany.⁴¹

Other manuscripts represent examples of miniature painting from notable masters. For example, the Frankfurt *Rose* (Frankfurt, Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek, MS lat. qu. 65) has been ascribed to the Maubeuge Master working for Thomas de Maubeuge in Paris c. 1320. The Master of the Duc de Berry, to take another instance, painted the Stuttgart *Rose* (Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, MS Cod. Poet. et phil. 2° 6), soon after 1400. Knowing the bookshops of origin in such cases enables comparison of the *Rose* codex with fourteenth-century vernacular works produced in the same workshop.

For example, Richard and Mary Rouse have authoritatively attributed the Düsseldorf *Rose* to the Parisian bookshop run by Richard de Montbaston and his wife Jeanne de Montbaston.⁴² From their shop on the Rue Neuve Notre Dame, for some twenty-five years from just before 1330 until sometime after 1355, this husband and wife team produced notable examples of thirteenth-century works such as this *Rose* or *La Légende dorée*, as well as new works with significant links to the *Rose*, e.g., Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, Richard de Fournival's *Bestiaire d'amour*, a *Roman de Fauvel*, and – of particular interest to the interconnection between projects – a number of manuscripts of the *Bible historiale*.⁴³

Jeanne de Montbaston has been identified as the bas-de-page illuminator of a famous *Rose* codex (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 25526) showing nuns gathering penis's from a penis tree, a Deguileville *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, and three manuscripts of works from Jacques de Longuyon's Peacock cycle (the text that first codified the legend of *les neufs Preux* or Nine Worthies). She also collaborated with her husband on the il-

⁴⁰ The manuscripts in question are: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, MS gall. qu. 80 and MS Ham 577; Düsseldorf, Bibliothek der Staatlichen Kunstakademie, MS A.B. 142; Frankfurt, Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek, MS lat. qu. 65; München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Gall 17; and Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, MS Cod. Poet. et phil. 2° 6.

⁴¹ Weyer 2006, 118.

⁴² Rouse & Rouse 2000, 235–239. Quoted by Weyer 2006, 125.

⁴³ See Busby 2002, 591.

lumination of BnF, ms fr. 15391 (a *Bible historiale*). Richard painted folios 1–8v, 131 to 204, and 283v to 311v, while Jeanne did folios 11 to 114v, 228 to 265, and 318 to 340.⁴⁴

Since similar evidence can be adduced for the workshop of Thomas de Maubeuge as well as for the Master of the Duc de Berry, there is ample evidence, then, to connect the German *Rose* manuscripts to the flourishing book culture in Paris in the fourteenth century. That observation is strongly reinforced by the knowledge that Richard and Jeanne de Montbaston's atelier produced some nineteen *Rose* manuscripts – of which the Düsseldorf codex is one. The triangulation of *Rose* codices, a particular workshop, and popular fourteenth century texts becomes even more interesting – and compelling – when we remember that the Montbaston and Maubeuge workshops produced a number of *Bibles historiques* (sometimes even working together).

At least nine *Bible historiale* codices, for example, have been ascribed to Richard and Jeanne de Montbaston, all made between 1330 and the mid-1350s.⁴⁵ It is particularly interesting to think of comparing the *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* painted by Jeanne de Montbaston and her *Rose* manuscripts, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Montbaston *Bibles historiques*. Deguileville's text specifically references the *Rose*, so one would expect to find a generative dialectic in that case – though its variable manifestations are what would be of interest. But in the case of the *Bible historiale* the differential imitation can't be predicted in advance, but only intuited on the basis of the long discourses of Nature and of Genius in which Jean de Meun glosses theological doctrine in 'a new – and controversial – key'.

Once the interaction of *Rose* manuscripts with book production in the first half of the fourteenth century has been explored, the same process can be undertaken in the case of the Stuttgart *Rose* – from the hand of the Master of the Duc de Berry – with works of Guillaume de Machaut, a poet intimately familiar with Jean de Meun, and whose work is associated with the *Rose* in at least one important codex, Bibliothèque Municipale d'Arras, ms 897. This manuscript is of particular interest because it contains, aside from Machaut's *Jugement du roy de Behaigne*, ten other works (including Jean's own *Testament*), whose themes relate directly to aspects of the *Roman de la Rose*.

The influence of Jean de Meun on the poetics of Machaut has been noted with growing frequency in recent years. Machaut's subtlety in transforming thematic oppositions of ideas and characters from Jean's work into very different configurations and genres may be seen, for example in an article by Kevin Brownlee published in *Early Music History*, 'Machaut's Motet 15 and the *Roman de la Rose*'.⁴⁶ Other studies could be cited as well, but as in the case of studies on the transmission of *Rose* manuscripts by Badel and Huot, these comparisons also assume unidirectional influence. Again, one finds an underlying assumption that the generative mimetic force emanates

44 Fournié 2009, no. 107: 'Paris, France, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Français 15391, Présentation' (<http://acrh.revues.org/1469#tocto1n12>).

45 Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, ms W 145 A & B; Enschede (Netherlands), Rijksmuseum Twente, ms Inv. no. 2; New York, Morgan Library, ms 322 and 323; New York, Public Library, ms Spencer 4; Paris, BnF, ms fr. 15391; Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, ms 20 and 21; Philadelphia, Free Library, ms MVIII 10. For a list of *Bible historiques* manuscripts see Fournié 2009 (<http://acrh.revues.org/1830>).

46 Brownlee 1991.

from a hyper-concept we can call the *Rose*-qua-work. From that perspective the manuscript that instantiates the poem remains external to it. It seems hard to imagine how anyone could dismiss the drama of the manuscript presentation as adventitious.

Still, when one conceives the ‘work’ as somehow above or beyond any given manifestation of it, when one thinks of it as the sum of n -manifestations – as opposed to having its very *mode of being* in them – then the individual representation does become invisible. Without denying that there is indeed a ‘hyper-concept’ of the *Rose* emerging from the sum of our experiences with it, we must recognize that that is matter for a different kind of critical and philosophical project. What’s at issue here is to recognize that the generative force of each manuscript representation is not unique to the *Rose*-qua-work, but emerges from the culture of literary productivity itself. On this view, the process of differential imitation does not simply affect the content of works produced contemporaneously by a bookshop, it can even influence the choice and poetics of the works copied.

Yet, at the end of the day, is this the whole story? Is it really the case that we’re forced to choose between a concept of the work ‘as somehow above or beyond any manifestation of it’, and ‘the work-that-has-its-being in a given manuscript version?’ I think not. After all, for a work to manifest what I’ve called ‘generative force’ sufficient to motivate a transmission history lasting well over two centuries and running to hundreds of manuscript versions, it must also generate in its readers a very strong ‘hyper-concept’. If, as noted above, that is matter for a different theoretical study, we can at least see that the starting point of the inquiry – and the ending point for this article – lies in contemplating the tensile strength of literary form. Poetic structure in the manuscript age is dynamic; it constantly accommodates the stress of modification without losing its ability to adjust to load changes or to suffer any reduction in performance or loss of identity. That is the basis for the medieval paradox I call ‘mutable stability’.

Summary

The medieval codex fostered textual mutability as opposed to the ‘fixed text’ made possible by print. Yet, the Middle Ages resisted change in and for itself. This paper explores the delicate balance between stability, on the one hand, and transformation, on the other in medieval vernacular literature. Only a culture that saw no contradiction in promulgating an omnipotent, unchanging divinity, which was at the same time a dynamic principle of construction and transformation could have managed the paradox of ‘mutable stability’. While this principle operates in a number of domains – not least in the myriad art forms known as ‘Romanesque’ – this paper focuses on manuscript transmission of vernacular literature. In particular, it examines the concepts of ‘sameness’ and ‘resemblance’ that shaped the concepts of vision in the *Roman de la Rose*, and thus manuscripts transmission. Using the idea of generative or regenerative transformation of the text, the paper illustrates a basic principle of stability, namely, ‘the ability of an object to adjust to load changes without any reduction in performance’.

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Afbeelding voorzijde: London, British Library,
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